

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON

Analysis of Vedanta Philosophy VII

You are the God of this universe. You are creating the whole universe and drawing it in. Thus says the Advaitist. The sun, the moon, and the whole universe are but drops in your transcendent nature. How can you be born or die? I never was born, never will be born. I never had father or mother, friends or foes, for I am Existence, Knowledge, Bliss, Absolute. I am He, I am He. So, what is the goal, according to this philosophy? That those who receive this knowledge are one with the universe. For them, all heavens and even Brahmaloaka are destroyed, the whole dream vanishes, and they find themselves the eternal God of the universe. They attain their real individuality, with its infinite knowledge and bliss, and become free. Pleasures in little things cease. We are finding pleasure in this little body, in this little individuality. How much greater the pleasure when this whole universe is my body! If there is pleasure in one body, how much more when all bodies are mine! Then is freedom attained. And this is called Advaita, the non-dualistic Vedanta philosophy. These are the three steps which Vedanta philosophy has taken, and we cannot go any further, because we cannot go beyond unity. When a science reaches a unity, it cannot by any manner of means go any further. You cannot go beyond this idea of the Absolute. All people cannot take up this Advaita philosophy; it is hard. First of all, it is very hard to understand it intellectually. It requires the sharpest of intellects, a bold understanding. Secondly, it does not suit the



vast majority of people. So there are these three steps. Begin with the first one. Then by thinking of that and understanding it, the second will open itself. Just as a race advances, so individuals have to advance. The steps which the human race has taken to reach to the highest pinnacles of religious thought, every individual will have to take. Only, while the human race took millions of years to reach from one step to another, individuals may live the whole life of the human race in a much shorter duration. But each one of us will have to go through these steps. The man who says, here is this world, and there is no (Personal) God, is a fool; because if there is a world, there will have to be a cause, and that is what is called God. You cannot have an effect without knowing that there is a cause. God will only vanish when this world vanishes; then you will become God (Absolute), and this world will be no longer for you.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2016), 1, 393-94.



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उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।
Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Maitrayaniya Upanishad

February 2017
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मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

अथ य एषोऽन्तरे हृत्पुष्कर एवाश्रितोन्नमति स एषोऽग्निर्दिवि श्रितः सौरः कालाख्योऽदृश्यः
सर्वभूतान्यन्नमतीति । कः पुष्करः किम्पयो वेति । इदं वाव तत्पुष्करं योऽयमाकाशोऽस्येम-श्चतस्रो
दिशश्चतस्र उपदिशो दलसंस्था आसम् । अर्वाग्विचरत एतौ प्राणादित्या एता उपासीतीमित्येतदक्षरेण
व्याहृतिभिः सावित्र्या चेति

॥६.२॥

*Atha ya esho'ntare hrit-pushkara eva-ashrito'nnam-atti sa esho'gnir divi shritah saurah
kalakhyo'drishyah sarvabhutany-annam-attiti. Kah pushkarah kim-mayo veti. Idam vava tat-
pushkaram yo'yam-akasho'syemash-chatastro dishash-chatasra upadisho dala-samstha asam.
Arvag-vicharata etau pranaditya eta upasitim-ity-etad-aksharena vyahritibhih savitrya cheti.*

(6.2)

Now, one who has entered the lotus of the heart and eats food is the same as that fire of the Sun which enters the sky, called Time, the Invisible, who eats all beings as his food. What is the lotus and of what is it made? That lotus is indeed the same as space. The four directions and the four intermediate directions are its leaves. These two, vital breath and the Sun, move near one another. Let him worship them with the syllable Om, with the mystic utterances of *bhuh*, *bhuvah*, and *svah*, and with the Savitri prayer.

(6.2)

THIS MONTH

THE HINDUS HAVE LOST identification with their religion and culture. Due to more than a thousand year of slavery, they have lost all dignity and do not possess pride in one's past that is necessary for preserving one's heritage and also to develop one's culture and civilisation. What has led to such a plight? What is the solution to this problem? These questions are discussed in **The Mild Hindu**.

Swami Vivekananda's life was full of ship-voyages, the details of many of which are not available to us. Many researchers are trying to find more information about these voyages. Swami Medhasananda, the monk in-charge, Vedanta Society of Japan, gives a detailed account of his research and the information he obtained in **The Voyage of Swami Vivekananda from Bombay to Kobe—May to June 1893: New Findings**.

Sri Ramakrishna's life is a complex web of supra-human achievements that exudes simplicity at all levels. This remarkable life has inspired many works of fiction and philosophy since his passing. Nicola Barker, an English novelist and short story writer from London has written a novel on Sri Ramakrishna titled *The Cauliflower*. Swami Narasimhananda, the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, interviewed her through email, which is given in **Nicola Barker: An Interview about The Cauliflower**.

In November 2015, Swami Atmarupananda, a monk at Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, gave a talk in a programme entitled *Awakening the Light of Dharma: How to Uphold Dharma*

in the World Today, organised by the Global Peace Initiative in Varanasi and Sarnath. This talk has been adapted as an article in **Towards a Dharma-Based Economy**.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, has been asked various questions regarding various aspects of spiritual life by the young and old alike, over a period of time. The ninth instalment of the collection of such questions and his answers to them is given in **Vedanta Answers**.

Sister Nivedita's life was one of multiple dimensions and an analysis of her character could go on endlessly. Swami Sandarshananda, a monk at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, Kolkata, tells this **Saga of Epic Proportions** in its second instalment.

Many wonderful nuggets of wisdom contained in ancient scriptures are difficult to understand. In *Balabodha*, such ancient wisdom is made easy. This month's topic is **Vedanta**.

Anger destroys us and controlling anger is the only way out. This is the moral of the story **Anger Should Subside**. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Arulneri Kathaigal*.

Stephen Yablo, is professor of linguistics and philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the author of *Things: Papers on Objects, Events, and Properties* and *Thoughts: Papers on Mind, Meaning, and Modality*. He has written **Aboutness**. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

EDITORIAL

The Mild Hindu

THE UPANISHADS EXHORT strength and dispel the darkness of ignorance, bringing clarity to our befuddled minds. They clear the cobwebs of confusion, remove weakness, and restore strength. The Upanishadic rishis were bold enough to dismiss the entire universe as a fanciful imagination and took all the focus to the Self. The Puranas speak of Sage Parashurama, who wiped off all ruler-clans from the face of the earth, not once or twice, but twenty-one times. They also mention Sage Vishvamitra, who created a separate heaven for one who had taken refuge in him. They speak of the fierce goddess, who chopped to shreds asuras, who were destroying the peace of the earth. Which Hindu scripture talks of weakness? Which Hindu text encourages cowardice? Which Hindu scripture denounces strength? None.

Today's Hindu has earned the epithet 'mild', which has been handed over by the ancestors over several centuries. However, in recent times, the Hindu is behaving in a way that conforms to the derogatory meaning of this term. Swami Vivekananda used to say that the epithet 'mild Hindu' should not be seen as a criticism but as an acknowledgement of the resilient and patient spirit of Hinduism. The present-day Hindu, however, is bent on proving one's qualifications, all on the negative side, to be called 'mild'. Almost giving up one's glorious past, today's Hindu wants to comfortably piggyback on the achievements of other cultures and races, and has become accustomed to being a slave. The Hindu has lost one's nerve and also lacks any spine. Who can criticise Hinduism

or the Hindu people? Anyone. And, instead of addressing such criticism or silencing baseless allegations, today's Hindu takes pride in becoming

Dumb 'neutral' witnesses are worse than those who commit injustice.

partners with those who want to see the end of the Hindu race. Hinduism or the Hindu race will never perish because, as Swamiji said, if that were to happen, religion and spirituality would disappear from this world. So, Hinduism does not need anyone to protect or preserve it. It has stood the test of time over millennia of suffering, and would continue to do so in the future too. But, every time a Hindu is attacked or hurt, it is not Hinduism that takes the beating but it is the faith of that individual Hindu that goes down. And it is really an unfortunate and dismal state of affairs, that the present-day Hindu is overenthusiastic in criticising Hinduism or attacking the Hindu people.

A Hindu scholar today, takes pride in denigrating all the Hindu scriptures. Any attempt to disseminate the Hindu thought is met with the strong 'intellectual' objection that Hinduism should not be transmitted or studied. That is illogical. If Hinduism does not need dissemination or studies, then no religion does. Why is it that the present-day Hindu is keen on seeing other religions being transmitted or studied and knows so much about them, while knowing next to nothing about Hinduism? Today's Hindu does not have the courage even to call Hinduism a religion and is dumb enough to call it just 'a way of life'. This again does

not make any sense. If Hinduism is a way of life, so is every other religion. If that is so, can we call the practitioners of other religions as Hindus? And, even if one were to do so, will the followers of other religions accept that? The answer is a resounding 'no'. Then, in what sand is today's Hindu burying one's head and trying to live in an illusory world?

There is no systematic tradition of transmitting the basic knowledge of Hinduism to Hindu children. All they know of it is some rituals, whose meaning and importance are never explained to them. As a result, successive generations of Hindus are fed on false information about Hinduism that they get from popular culture and turn out to be avowed haters of Hinduism, thus fulfilling the aims of vested interests.

It seems that by some inexplicable process of evolution, Hindus have totally lost the qualities of valour, shame, honour, and sensitivity. Else, how could one explain the fact that in India, the land that cradled the masters of Hindu thought, hundreds of Hindus are being made homeless, numerous temples are being destroyed, several images of Hindu deities are being vandalised, sacred Hindu mantras are being made fun of—and all this is being supported by powerful Hindus and many a time, Hinduism is being ridiculed by Hindus themselves. Upon being questioned, these Hindus very calmly reply that they do all this to express their 'freedom of expression'. But, what 'freedom of expression' warrants or gives one right to commit an act of dishonouring one's own Mother?

No religious scriptures are bolder than the Vedas, which proclaim that the highest realisation is not to be attained by the mere parroting of Vedic sentences. But, the Vedas do not ask one to live without any honour and dignity. Today's Hindu considers everything non-Vedic to be gospel truth and anything Vedic to be superstitious. Hinduism accepts all paths to God. But,

today's Hindu conveniently forgets that other religions are not so catholic and generous. Today, no religious other than the Hindu, even those belonging to faith-traditions that have branched off from Hinduism, believes that all religions are true. Therefore, it is important that the Hindu should accept all religions as true but should not denounce Hinduism itself as false. Hordes of Hindu 'scholars' unashamedly proclaim Hinduism to be no religion or an 'umbrella' religion, the Vedas to be non-Hindu, yoga to be non-Hindu, and India itself to be divested of its Hindu origins. Hankering and drooling after glitter and glamour, these 'academics' would disown their Mother without batting an eyelid. Any attempt to study Hinduism in-depth is denounced and promptly stopped. And, the only time when Hinduism seems interesting to these shameless and honourless people is when videos of white-skinned children chanting Hindu scriptures circulate on the Internet. Paraphrasing what Swamiji asked his disciples in a different context, one is tempted to ask: 'Is there not water enough in the ocean to drown these so-called scholars and academics with their books, computers, and all?'

Swamiji said: 'Strength is life and weakness is death.' Those who claim to be not weak and yet cannot assert to be strong are worse than being weak. Dumb 'neutral' witnesses to an act of injustice are worse than those who commit that injustice. Swamiji was proud that this 'mild' Hindu race has produced fighting women like the Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi. And, while aboard a ship, Swamiji lifted by the collar, an Englishman who was abusing India. The Hindus need to be patient and resilient but they also need to strengthen and express the fighting streak in them and have the courage to take to task those who have the nerve to malign Hinduism.





Old Antique C 1900 RMS Peninsular Steamship

The Voyage of Swami Vivekananda from Bombay to Kobe —May to June 1893: New Findings

Swami Medhasananda

Important New Information on Swamiji

WITH REFERENCE TO the life and work of Swami Vivekananda, any kind of information we newly chance upon, is possessed of value and merit. The reason for this is because he was not just any ordinary monk but a prophet, and in the arena of religious and philosophical thought, he exerted an influence not just on his motherland, India, but on the entire world as well.

These new findings pertaining to the voyage of Swamiji that is written about here are also matters of significance and value. From May to June 1893, Swamiji sailed for the first time from the city of Bombay, now called Mumbai, to Japan. On probing the issue, what I came across were the dates on which he set foot in a variety of places and ports in

the course of his voyage, the exact date on which he entered Japan, and the length of time he spent in Japan. These new findings will perhaps provide us important clues towards the clarification of facts, concerning such events and activities.

Information Already Available on Swamiji's Voyage to Japan

On 31 May 1893, Swamiji departed by ship from the city of Bombay in India, and the purpose of his voyage was to participate in the first World Parliament of Religions, scheduled to be held in Chicago on 11 September of that year. The ship in which he sailed was named the *Peninsular*. In a letter sent on this occasion, he states that his ship first stopped at Ceylon, present-day Sri Lanka, at the port of Colombo, the former capital, and later at Penang, an island located to the west of Malaysia,

at the north entrance of the Strait of Malacca, and then at Singapore and Hong Kong to enter the port of Nagasaki, where, after spending a few hours in the city, he finally disembarked in Kobe.

Readers of Swamiji's letter written after he had reached Japan are likely under the impression that he had sailed on the same ship all the way from Bombay to Kobe, and besides, on seeing this letter, we could know neither the dates of the calls made by the ship at various ports, nor the date of Swamiji's landing in Japan. As regards dates, what we ascertained from earlier documents is the fact that on 31 May he boarded the *Peninsular* and sailed from Bombay, on 10 July he despatched a letter from Yokohama, and on 14 July he departed from Japan by boarding a ship named *Empress of India* at Yokohama and proceeding to the city of Vancouver in Canada, from where he travelled by train to Chicago.

Japanese Sources

To acquire some more detailed knowledge regarding the said voyage of Swamiji, I requested the cooperation of certain members of the Vedanta Study Group in the Kansai area of Japan, and checked to see if any relevant documents pertaining to the issue were available in the local newspaper offices, immigration bureaus, libraries, archives, and other related places. For this investigation, examining old newspapers was especially important as those were the sole reliable means of informing people concerning the ship's operational status, with reference to issues such as passengers, letters, and the transportation of luggage.

In such a situation, I received a message from Ms Chieko Morioka of the said Study Group, informing me that some of the old newspapers published in Japan related to that period were currently preserved in the Kobe city archives. Hence, in order to learn when exactly the ship named *Peninsular* entered the port of Kobe, I proceeded on

25 July 2016 to the Kobe city archives in the company of Ms Atsumi Honda and Ms Miwako Tanabe of the Study Group, who came along with me in order to assist me with the Japanese language for the investigation. Although the old Japanese characters and archaic use of the language proved to be stumbling blocks, yet, with the diligent backing of Mr Matsumoto, the director of the archives, we succeeded in examining the records dealing with the entry and departure of foreign ships into the Kobe port, as well as the advertisements printed in *Kobe Yushin Nippo* and *Osaka Asahi* newspapers, which were preserved in the archives.

If the *Peninsular* had set sail from Bombay on 31 May we reasoned it would have entered the port of Kobe after an interval of at least two weeks, and so we examined the newspapers for any details concerning this issue, from around the middle of June to the beginning of July. At times, there appeared dates for which newspapers were not available in the archives, but that did not prove a major barrier. Even so however, despite our best efforts, we could not come across any piece of information concerning the *Peninsular*.

Information of the Ships of the P&O Company Sailing from Hong Kong to Yokohama

Nonetheless, on checking certain texts conserved in the archives that referred to advertisements and other such matters, we did manage to find the name *Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company* in the *Japan Directory* for the year 1893. This was the company that owned the ship *Peninsular*, and the concerned advertisement was written in English, with an orientation to Japan. The document made no mention whatever of a ship named *Peninsular*, although mention was made of the navigations of certain other ships, having the names *Verona* and *Ancona*. It was stated that these ships sailed once a fortnight

between Hong Kong and Yokohama, stopping en route at Nagasaki and Kobe. On seeing this, when we later examined the names of the *Verona* and *Ancona* in documents linked to the *P & O Company*, we found the following report concerning the arrival of these ships into the port. The *Kobe Yushin Nippo* mentioned the names of the ships, while the *Osaka Asahi* newspaper used the name of the company, in their reports.

The notices of the entry of ships into the Kobe Port in the middle of June 1893 are the following two:

- *Kobe Yushin Nippo*, 9 June: The *Ancona* to enter around June 13, from Hong Kong.
- *Osaka Asahi* newspaper, 15 June: From Europe through Hong Kong, June 16, a ship of *P & O Company*.

The notices of the entry of ships into the Kobe Port around the end of June 1893 are the following two:

- *Kobe Yushin Nippo*, 29 June: On 30 June, the *Verona* to enter from Hong Kong and immediately depart for Yokohama.
- *Osaka Asahi* newspaper, 20, 29 June: From Europe through Hong Kong, June 30, a ship of *P & O Company*.

As mentioned earlier, judging by Swamiji's letter of 10 July from Yokohama, we get the impression that he boarded the *Peninsular* in Bombay and sailed on the same ship all the way to Kobe. Yet, in the newspaper notices there is no mention of the *Peninsular*. Rather, the notices mention only the names of the *Verona* and *Ancona*. Accordingly, there were two possibilities. One was that the *Peninsular* did indeed arrive in Kobe, but no mention was made of its arrival in the newspapers of Kobe and Osaka. The other possibility was that the *Peninsular* sailed to Hong Kong, and there, Swamiji boarded a different ship belonging to the same company, namely either the *Verona* or *Ancona*. If we were to accept the latter

possibility, it would mean he entered Kobe on 13 or 16 June, or even perhaps on 30 June. As to which of these possibilities is the right one, is a major issue we now confront. Since Swamiji left the country on 14 July from Yokohama, it would mean his stay in Japan lasted between two weeks to a month. If it were a month, then where could he have possibly spent such a length of time? On the other hand, assuming it was just two weeks, what was his itinerary? Perceiving here that the schedule of his travels within Japan get altered depending on the date of his arrival in the country, I resolved to continue the investigation.

P & O Company Records

Thereupon the website of the *Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company*, dealing with large steamships, the company that owned the *Peninsular*, was checked.¹ It was learnt from the website that in March 2006, the *D P World Company* of Dubai purchased the *P & O Company*. However, owing to the *P & O Company's* past magnificent history, which exceeded a hundred years, it had vast quantities of rich records, and so the staff of the new company uploaded most of them to their website. Hence, I could get the desired information about records concerning the *Peninsular* that had departed from Bombay on 31 May 1893, as well as its anchorage sites, the dates on which it entered different ports, and the list of passengers on board the

Verona in Harbour



ship, but was unable to verify anything. Even so, it was also learnt from the website of *D P World* that the early records concerning the *Peninsular* and other ships of the *P & O Company* had been loaned to the *National Maritime Museum*, located in Greenwich, London.² Incidentally, *National Maritime Museum* is the leading maritime museum of the United Kingdom, and is said to be the largest museum of its kind in the world.

Experiences gathered during the investigation showed that striving to obtain information regarding Swamiji's voyage on the *Peninsular* from the website of *D P World* or *National Maritime Museum*, through email and letters, will yield no results whatsoever, due to the fact that the documents and information asked for were special. Hence it needed a personal visit to the said museum and a thorough investigation had to be carried out there.

Records Examined

Fortunately, however, Dr Anindya Sundar Mandal, an alumnus of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira college in Belur, happened to reside in London on account of his work as a medical practitioner. In view of that, I contacted him with a request to go over to the *National Maritime Museum* and investigate the matter. Both Dr Mandal and the members of the museum staff expended a great deal of time and effort in the enquiry. They diligently sifted through certain early records of the *P & O Company* that were 123 years old and sent me scanned copies of the relevant documents and by virtue of that data, it was possible to verify the fact that on 31 May 1893 the *Peninsular* had set sail from Bombay, as well as other details concerning its various ports of call.

Dates of Swamiji's Visits

According to the newly available data, the name of the vessel that Swamiji boarded was

S S Peninsular of *Voyage No. 227*, and it set sail from Bombay on 31 May, Thursday, at 5 p.m. On 3 June, it entered Colombo, and later departed from Colombo on 6 June. On 7 June it reached Penang and on 8 June it left Penang and sailed for Singapore, to reach Hong Kong on 13 June. The documents and later correspondence with Martin Salmon, an archivist of the said museum revealed further that the *Peninsular* did not sail at all to Japan as following its usual route it sailed further down to Shanghai and then turned back and returned to the UK through Singapore, Penang, Colombo, Bombay, Aden, through the Suez Canal to the Malta and Gibraltar. Hence, at Hong Kong, Swamiji had to transfer his ship to either the *Verona* or *Ancona* of the same *P & O Company* bound for Japan. This however evoked other issues, namely, which was the ship he boarded, and precisely on which day he arrived in Japan.

In the data we touched upon information was provided regarding the *Verona* and *Ancona*, and hence, on the basis of that information, a detailed schedule covering the voyage undertaken by those vessels from the months of June to July, namely their voyage from Hong Kong to Kobe, and from Kobe to Yokohama was created. The *Ancona* left Hong Kong on 9 June, entered Nagasaki on 11, and arrived in Kobe on 30. If we were to base our analysis on the fact that the *Peninsular* entered Hong Kong on 13 June, Swamiji could not have boarded the *Ancona*, since it had already left Hong Kong for Japan on 9 June. This being the case, we have no choice but to admit that the ship Swamiji sailed on from Hong Kong to Japan, must have been the *Verona*.

That is to say, Swamiji entered Hong Kong on the *Peninsular* on 13 and on 24 he set sail for Japan on board the *Verona*. However, this evokes another knotty issue, because if this were so, then what could Swamiji have done during the eleven days he had at his disposal prior to his boarding

Nicola Barker: An Interview about *The Cauliflower*

Nicola Barker / Swami Narasimhananda



[Nicola Barker has written a novel on Sri Ramakrishna titled *The Cauliflower*. Swami Narasimhananda, the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, interviewed her through email, which is given here.]

QUESTION: In *The Cauliflower*, you have done a breakthrough by relating a unique form of narrative with the life of a spiritual personage instead of the established historical novel or biography. How did you envisage this?

Answer: I've spent many years, as a novelist, contemplating different ways in which to make faith or the spiritual dimension a part of the everyday—something at once real and natural. My religious life is an essential part of both who I am and what I create. But it's important, as a writer, especially in the secular West—where faith is often treated with ambivalence, even downright hostility—not to push your agendas, be they political, gender-related, or faith-based, too strongly—not to become strident, but to hint, cajole, suggest, and explore; to allow the reader to experience things for themselves simply by piquing their interest.

The idea for this novel first came up on a long train journey to Edinburgh. I was travelling with my press officer, Patrick Hargadon. We are both Catholics and were talking about various books written by monks—Thomas Merton is a great favourite of ours. For some reason Sri Ramakrishna entered the conversation, probably via Christopher Isherwood, and Patrick exclaimed, 'I'm familiar with him but there is so much more I'd like to find out!'

I was starting another, bigger book at the time, but Patrick's enthusiasm was infectious. I just thought: I need to share Sri Ramakrishna with the literary West. So I went home and started re-reading many of the books I'd accumulated over the years. The novel, it needs to be said, is entirely focussed on appealing to a Western, secular mindset, so there were many potential pitfalls. In many ways what I have brought to the story is a measure of distance and a pinch of cynicism. Without these your 'average' Western reader would just judge the book as purely devotional, as too partisan, and be suspicious. I wanted the book, at root, to be something fresh in terms of its literary form, but also innovative in terms of the story of Ramakrishna himself. Because, as anyone reading this will know, there are dozens of truly superb works already in existence about this great saint. So what might I possibly add?

I knew that the book had to be fun—because the guru's sense of mischief was very evident—and it had to be multifarious, because the guru worshipped and lived in such a colourful and varied way. But at heart I wanted it to be a novel not just about Sri Ramakrishna, but about all charismatic leaders and how and why their stories come to be told. Jesus is the obvious example. Everything we know about his life comes to us through his disciples. The story was never a solid, predictable narrative. It took hundreds of years for the various gospels to cohere into a whole. And much of what was written has been cast aside, as contradictory or unreliable. But who decides what's important? How are these decisions made, and why? Isn't the book we read today—The Bible—at some level partial, political, compromised?

With these questions in mind I approached the story of Sri Ramakrishna. It fascinated me that this was a much newer story and so there

was way more information to mull over. But which bits are the most significant? And who am I to pick and choose? As far as was possible I wanted the readers to have the option to find out for themselves. So I was open and honest about this upfront: I am not a disciple of the guru's. I am not an expert in Hinduism. I have a Western sensibility. But I do understand stories. I am a novelist. And I can play with form.

Do I have a right to hold forth on Sri Ramakrishna? No. But do I think more people should be thinking about him and celebrating his extraordinary legacy? Absolutely!

So I sat down and began to write—from a place of love and innocence. Perhaps that was naive. But writing, for me, is fun. It's exciting. And in my experience the best things in life emerge when you ignore conventions and boundaries, when you embrace the transgressive. In essence, I suppose what I am trying to say is that how the book is shaped is a reflection of the guru himself. The narrative tries to describe the saint by taking on his characteristics.

Do I think this is something new? I don't know. All I know is that it felt right.

Question: What prompted you to select the name of this work? The word 'cauliflower' has much similarity with 'Kali-flower'. Did you intend such a meaning?

Answer: Yes, I was aware of the linguistic movement between the words 'cauli' and 'Kali'. Ideas about the way words and meaning bleed into one another have always been a part of my work. Language fascinates me—what it reveals and what it disguises. From very early on I knew what the book's title would be because the thing that fascinates me most when reading about Sri Ramakrishna is how much the people around him contribute to who he is and what he becomes. The most loyal and yet most tragic of

these individuals is Hriday. And it is his story, at some level, that is told throughout the novel. We see Ramakrishna through his eyes. And when we are with Hriday we feel both love and consternation. The cauliflower itself personifies the difference between these two remarkable men. Both are at once very grown up and yet strangely childlike. Sri Ramakrishna loved to eat cauliflower but it played havoc with his digestion. Hriday wanted to protect and care for his uncle, so he grabbed the cauliflower away, but his love ended up stifling him. I think this idea extends to all walks of life: love is a power balance. It is a narrow path and needs to be very carefully negotiated.

Question: What literature did you refer to for writing this book?

Answer: The main texts I used—I call the novel a mosaic of other people's scholarship and experience, and this is perfectly true—were obviously *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and Isherwood's wonderful biography of the guru; *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*. But I was heavily influenced by Lex Hixon's *The Great Swan*. And I can't overstate how important Elizabeth U Harding's *Kali: The Black Goddess of Dakshineswar* was in the book's construction. There were many, many wonderful books. And I firmly believe that the quality of the things that are published about the guru is a reflection of the mystery and genius of the guru himself.

Of course above and beyond all of these looms the great shadow of the works of Swami Chetanananda: *They Lived With God* and *Ramakrishna as We Saw Him*. Without these two publications the novel could not have been written. Everything that is funny and sincere and honest in the novel is borrowed from the swami.

Question: Why did you choose Sri Ramakrishna's life?

Answer: I chose Sri Ramakrishna's life because it is so colourful and so extraordinary. He lived at a fascinating moment in history. He at once personified the times in which he lived and was at odds with them. He was a Renaissance figure, surrounded by an extraordinary group of charismatic people. He was childlike and yet powerful. He defied convention. He was profoundly loveable. And he is deeply mysterious. If I wanted to invent a character to write about I simply couldn't do better than him—but he was real!

Question: How do you look upon Sri Ramakrishna?

Answer: I think it's often a tendency, when you write a book about someone, to become slightly bored or jaded by the subject matter. This is almost inevitable—even necessary—because you need to move on afterwards, creatively, but I must confess that the more I have found out about Sri Ramakrishna the more entranced I have become by him. His allure remains completely undiminished for me. I think he is amazing. And I don't believe I am overstating the matter when I say that I see him as one of the most fascinating and perplexing figures in world history.

Question: How do you relate yourself to Rani Rasmani? What feminist underpinnings do you find in her life?

Answer: The measure of any great person is often the company they keep, and Rani Rasmani, like Sri Ramakrishna, was an extraordinarily brave, fearless, adventurous, and transgressive individual. She certainly should be celebrated by feminists as a woman who—against great odds—negotiated and imploded social norms and taboos. She is powerful and kind—devout but tough. One can only imagine how much intelligence and subtlety and patience it took for her to achieve all that she did, as a widow, in

the Bengal of that time. But above and beyond everything else I think it's her devotion—both to the Goddess and to Ramakrishna—and her humility that I admire the most.

Question: Did you travel to India while researching for this book?

Answer: No. I didn't travel to India because I wanted to avoid the book turning into an exploration of my own, very personal impressions. It isn't 'my' journey. It isn't *Eat, Pray, Love*. It's an exercise in narrative and form. That's what makes the novel interesting—I hope!

Question: Do you think Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings are relevant today and how?

Answer: I don't think Sri Ramakrishna's teachings have ever been more relevant. Our world is increasingly segregated into different faiths. Religions are becoming more and more belligerent and intolerant of difference. We seem to forget that, at heart, we are all worshipping the same God, just in a variety of ways. Ramakrishna understood this and celebrated it. That's why his story is—and will remain—so very important.

Question: What are the main insights that you draw from Sri Ramakrishna's life?

Answer: I think the thing I have learned personally is that we are all, as people, full of contradictions. Often we aren't even aware of them. And that's okay. Sri Ramakrishna is both funny and serious at the same time. He celebrates pure joy and extreme sacrifice. At some level he has the ability to be completely different things to different people. That is both his genius and his great strength. In the West we like to think that a person should be just one thing—utterly consistent. But life is endlessly complex and multifarious, and so are we.

Question: How do you see the worship of Kali?

Answer: One of my main duties, I felt, when

writing the novel, was to act as a conduit for Hinduism to the West. I think it would be fair to say—and I'm ashamed to admit it—that Hinduism is generally perceived as an ancient and therefore almost primitive faith centred around idol worship. This terrible misconception has allowed many western intellectuals to discount all of the richness, diversity, colour, and intellectual brilliance of Hinduism—of which Kali worship is definitely a major facet. I would say that my novel is a kind of love letter both to Hinduism and to the Goddess. I think the West still has so much to learn from this remarkable faith—which is possibly best described through the Goddess Kali—as do I.

Question: Swami Vivekananda and his disciple, Sister Nivedita were highly influenced by Kali and wrote poems on her. What do you think of this influence?

Answer: I'm a firm believer in the idea that faith should be celebrated in as many ways as possible—through song, chanting, poetry, music, fiction, art, cinema. Devotion is all about celebration and the humble offering of the self. I like to see my work, in general, as an expression of love and a small offering to God.

Question: Have you created a new form of the historical novel or narrative through this book?

Answer: I try not to analyse what I do too closely because I think it's important for writers and artists to be unselfconscious—to be innocent. So my work is rarely 'considered'. It flows from a sense of fun. I enjoy being mischievous and inquisitive. I'm always very glad and grateful if other people enjoy it, but beyond that I can't honestly say. Although my gut instinct is that I am not the first person to write a book like this. I write—however unknowingly—within a tradition. I am just the sum of my many influences. Nothing more and nothing less.



Towards a Dharma-Based Economy

Swami Atmarupananda

[In early November 2015, the author participated in a four-day programme held in Varanasi and Sarnath entitled *Awakening the Light of Dharma: How to Uphold Dharma in the World Today*, organised by the Global Peace Initiative, in partnership with Jnana-Pravaha of Varanasi, the Sarnath International Nyingma Institute, and the Malaviya Centre for Peace Research. On November 8 the proceedings were held at the Sarnath International Nyingma Institute, which included a morning session on the topic ‘Principles of a Dharmic Economy’, moderated by Dr Tho Ha Vinh.¹ After Dr Tho gave an introduction to the topic, the author was asked to address the gathering. The following is the substance of his talk, adapted as an article—*Editor*.]

THIS MORNING WE ARE TO DISCUSS the possibilities of a dharma-based economy. But I think it will be useful if we first discuss where economic systems come from; the answer to that question is fundamental. How can we think of changing our economic system without first knowing the source of economic systems? Second, we will examine the present state of our existing economic system, in general terms. Third, we’ll look at the principles that can serve as a new foundation for a dharma-based economy. And finally we’ll look at some of the many efforts, the experiments already underway that are seeking to develop a new model.

So let us begin.

Where does our economic system come from? It isn’t a part of nature, though economic activity is certainly intrinsic to human society; but a particular society organises that economic activity in a particular way. In other words, economic activity is natural to human society, but

the economic system that a particular society uses is human-conceived.

By ‘human-conceived’ I don’t mean that people sat around and thought up the economic system any more than people think up language. No, it grew unconsciously; but how? It grew out of the stories we told ourselves and continue to tell ourselves, stories that answer fundamental questions: What is life? What is its purpose? Who am I? Who are other people and what is human society—that strange, intricately organised collective of other people? What is my relationship to the world, what are my responsibilities to the world, the world’s responsibilities to me? What is of value? Such stories are the myths of a society, and every society has them, including a modern, scientific, technological, atheistic society.

It is a demonstrable fact that the economy we have at any point in history has been generated unconsciously from the stories we tell ourselves, the stories that a society tells itself. So with all human institutions, so with society itself. We have the justice system we have in any particular society because of the stories we believe about justice. We have the penal system we have because of the stories our society tells itself about the nature of criminals and retribution and redemption.

Our problem today is that our stories no longer work. They are built on contradictions, which is perhaps true of all stories,² but the contradictions in our present stories have become compounded to the breaking point. This is true

not just of the economy. Political systems around the world are largely broken, governmental and private institutions around the world are showing cracks, the idea of the nation-state is broken, the climate is broken because of the stories we have told ourselves about nature and the use of nature. The environment—that miraculous, extremely complex living envelope that sustains us and includes us—is itself broken because of our human stories. And all of these are interrelated; but today we will focus on the economy.

This general idea is fundamental to our discussion: our economy is built upon accepted stories, not upon facts of nature. It is fundamental, because its recognition bestows a flexibility of thought and action: the economy we have is not a law of nature, but a choice, even if it was chosen unconsciously.

Now let us move on and look at some of the contradictions inherent in our economy.

First, and most obvious of the contradictions, our economic system is based on growth, specifically growth of production, consumption, and total monetary value of the system. Its aim is not to attain an equilibrium which can be sustained indefinitely. Its aim is growth, economic expansion. The reason why it is based on growth is important, and not beyond the understanding of anyone here, but it would take all my time to explain the reason. So for now, suffice it to say that the reason has to do with the way money is conceived of, created, and accounted for in the present system. For long ages of human history, economic systems were not dependent on constant growth: it's a modern phenomenon and therefore not intrinsic to economic activity.

So the modern system is based on growth, but continual growth in a finite system is headed for disaster from the beginning, headed for breakdown. Yes, there have been people warning of this problem for a long time, but they have been

ignored because the economy has expanded far beyond anything anyone ever imagined possible two hundred years ago, and it is still expanding. So why not believe that it can continue growing?

Because it can't. It's a practical, not a theoretical, impossibility. Yes, the population of the world is far larger than experts ever thought possible for the earth to sustain one hundred and two hundred years ago, and the economy is far larger than thought possible, but sooner or later we *will* hit natural limits, and it looks like sooner rather than later is in store for us.

Tied to this idea of continual growth is the destruction of the commons. 'The commons' is an interesting concept, universal in human societies in some form or another; but the conceptual understanding of 'the commons' as well as the term itself is taken from medieval England. The forests, rivers, lakes, and streams of a locality were under the control or 'ownership' of the lord of the manor, but were held for the common use, and therefore common good, hence 'commons.' The timber and firewood, the herbal medicines that could be gathered, the wild foodstuffs, the animals for hunting, fish for catching, the water itself for household use, and grasslands for grazing one's herds, all were there for the common good. And a 'commoner' was one who used the commons, as opposed to the lord who controlled them. Add to that early concept of the commons, the resources recognised in more modern times: mineral rights, oil, and the broadcast spectrum of electromagnetic waves; these also become part of the commons, no longer under the lord of the manor but under the control of the state.

The modern capitalist economies³ have more and more depended for their growth on privatising and monetising the commons and then selling the goods of the commons back to citizens, while the private interests controlling the

resources profit. Lumber, oil, minerals, grazing rights, the tourism industry, the broadcast spectrum, bottled water—all are examples of the commercialisation of the commons, which leads to the disappearance in actual fact of the commons into private interests, and in the case of most physical resources, the eventual depletion or destruction—through overuse, pollution, mountaintop removal, and the like—of the resources themselves. And now, as more and more has been privatised, there is a rush to privatise water—the most essential resource for life after air. Air alone is safe for the time being, as no one has found a viable way to commercialise it—though they have found plenty of ways to pollute it, leaving the cost of clean-up largely to taxes collected from the public.

Thus, as the commons disappears into private control and eventual depletion, we are reaching the limits of growth. And no growth means death, within the context of the modern economic system. That is why China, for instance, is desperately buying up rights to resources all over the world, especially in Africa and South America. In the end that won't work, because when a country is faced with the massive hunger and thirst of its own people, it isn't going to honour pieces of paper saying that another country owns the rights to the resources there. And that, by the way, leads to the projected wars of resources.

And so we have a system built on the need for constant growth, the privatisation and destruction of the commons, and another related element, another part of the story we tell ourselves: happiness lies in material conquest, possession, control, extraction, and consumption, in that order. Let us look at the central equation in that statement: happiness equals material consumption. Material consumption is, of course, a part of nature itself: all living systems have to consume food and water and air. And resources for material

consumption have been organised in human society from the beginning, and as such it isn't in itself a problem: rather, it's life. Hinduism, for instance, since ancient times has recognised that two of the four principal aims of human life are personal possession, *artha* and sense enjoyment, *kama*, both related to material consumption.

But something happened in the late nineteenth century, continuing increasingly to the present day: the conversion of the citizen into the consumer. In isolated places and times in the ancient world, such as ancient Athens and Rome, citizenship was a well-developed concept, meaning more than just being a ruler's subject or a country's resident. Again in Europe, with the birth of the nation-state, the concept of citizenship began to grow, until with the birth of an independent United States, citizenship took on full significance once more, implying rights and responsibilities and participation in state decision-making, a significance which began to spread to countries around the world.

Moving forward two hundred years, after the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on 11 September 2001, the erstwhile US President George W Bush told the American public that they should go out and shop, and thereby prove to the terrorists that they had not defeated the American people. If he had said that two hundred years earlier, one hundred years earlier, even forty years earlier, there would have been national outrage at such an insult to the people's status as citizens—equating it with the ability to shop. But in 2001 the outrage was isolated, muted, and ineffectual. Why? There are several connected reasons.

Until the late nineteenth century, people's purchases were needs-based. People needed food, so they bought groceries. They needed clothes, so they bought something appropriate to wear, or the material to make their own. A carpenter

needed tools, so she or he bought them from the local blacksmith, according to the demands of her or his work. But in the late nineteenth century, entrepreneurs found that they could sell many more things if they could *create* needs: make people interested in buying something that they had never known that they needed, by explaining to them why this product would make them happier or more successful. First, such agents of consumerism found that women were an untapped potential: they were sold new and improved gadgets to make their housework easier, and then women's fashion spread from the rich to the burgeoning middle class, so that decent clothes were no longer enough: they needed the latest fashion, and 'fashion' was created by the people selling the clothing. The same spread to men.

Advertisers developed the art of equating happiness with consumption.

In the early twentieth century, a nephew of Sigmund Freud named Edward Bernays brought Freud's psychological discoveries to America and applied them to the advertising industry. One of his many successes was to sell cigarettes to women. Previously, in Western society, it was considered 'unladylike' for women to smoke. So he began an advertisement campaign which portrayed women smoking cigarettes defiantly to express and flaunt their new-found social independence. It caught on, much to the delight of the tobacco industry, and large numbers of women began to express their autonomy by smoking in public.

Also, manufacturers discovered that, if they made a light bulb, for example, that would last twenty years, they would sell one only once in twenty years for a particular socket. If, however, they made light bulbs that lasted two years, they would sell ten times as many. And so began the idea of planned obsolescence of products.

And thus the citizen has become largely

reduced to a consumer. 'Reduced', because as the citizen became a consumer, forces were also at work reducing his effective participation in governance, a topic of great importance but separate from the present topic of the economy.

Another element in the breakdown of our economic system is our very understanding of work—participation in the economy. The Protestant work ethic which was so effective in motivating people to engage in economic and other activity, and which was instrumental in the rise of modern capitalism, has outlived its usefulness. The stories out of which the Protestant work ethic developed are no longer vital, leaving modern society without a viable philosophy of work. A much simplified version of the Protestant work ethic can be expressed in two equations: hard work is a sign of morality, and worldly success is a sign of God's favour. But the Protestant Christian worldview on which this ethic was based is all but dead.

The first blow to this philosophy of work happened in the early nineteenth century. As the Industrial Revolution began to reshape society, people who had once earned their livelihood by farming or through manual skills, like blacksmithing and shoemaking, began to work for wages in factories. Previously they had worked with a degree of autonomy, producing a needed good in exchange for which they earned money, which in turn allowed them to buy the necessities of life; their work was associated with accomplishment, pride, and they had a well-defined place in society. As the economic system began to change, people could no longer support themselves in the old way, and were forced into urban labour pools. Now they worked in return for wages for someone who controlled production and distribution; they were cogs in a larger machine, and were replaceable. This was widely recognised as a new form of slavery—wage

slavery—when it first arose. Now it is taken as natural. Most people today work long hours all week, week after week, in order to get money: their work often has little or nothing to do with their sense of identity or with a sense of fulfillment. They work for a pay check which allows them to buy what they want, and to entertain themselves in the very little time left to them outside of the workplace.

Another element of the present economic dilemma is of very recent origin—the phenomenal growth of the financial sector in society, in Europe, the Americas, Japan, and increasingly in developing countries like India and China. The financial sector has been around as long as there has been some form of money. Its primary purpose is to make unused money available for use by those who need it and can put it to good use. You have extra money that is sitting idle; I want to start a small business, and I have all the know-how and drive to do it, but no money. So you make the money available to me directly, or, in a more complex society, through financial institutions. And my success is partly owned by you as my financier, and so you profit as I profit. That is a social good.

But in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first, the financial sector has grown huge, and has become a way to make money out of money, huge amounts of money, making some people fabulously wealthy: it's a legal form of gambling. The problem is, in itself it contributes nothing to society. It isn't generating wealth by producing a social good, and wealth has to come from somewhere: it can't just be wished into existence. And so it is coming at the expense of actual social good, and it—among several other factors—is helping to create wealth inequality that hasn't been seen in generations.

All of these problems that we have discussed—the need to foster constant economic growth

in order to service debt, the destruction of the commons, the conversion of the citizen into the consumer, the fostering of dissatisfaction in the populace in order to stimulate artificial wants-based—as opposed to needs-based—purchases, the decline of the work ethic, the introduction of wage slavery, the cancerous growth of the financial sector, as well as other factors, amplify one another.

And it's not that this system ever really worked well for human happiness. It was more of a promise of future happiness, plus present sufficiency of food and clothing and shelter and consumer choices and entertainment for enough citizen-consumers to prevent popular revolt.

But now it isn't working and gradually that will be evident to people. Right now there's general awareness that the system isn't working well, but most people, including most professional economists, believe that we just need to make some minor adjustments to get the engine of society going smoothly again. No, it's broken, not theoretically but actually, and the inherent contradictions can no longer be sustained.

So what is the way out? The solution is nothing short of a grand new story based on a new and truer view of self, of the world, of humanity, of meaning, of happiness, of freedom, of relationships, and of the meaning and purpose of life. That will be the real solution.

The problem is, we are at a point of desperation, and can't wait for a new story to percolate through society and take hold and express itself through new institutions: that takes generations. Yes, that will still have to happen, but short-term thinking is needed as well as long-term thinking. And we need experimentation with new models.

Now, then, let us first look at some broad ideas that need to form the basis of any new system, focussing on the economic aspect. And then we'll look at some of the experiments that are happening, and which show promise.

Since we are meeting here as representatives of the dharma traditions, we will speak of a dharma-based economic system, and what that might look like. Remember, all human institutions are based on stories; in fact, the very way in which we perceive the world is based on stories. And so, if the story told is based on dharma—broadly defined, non-sectarian, and aware of the universal principles that unite our traditions—how does that work itself out in economic terms?

First of all, whether you take the Buddhist principle of dependent origination or the Hindu and Sikh principle of the oneness underlying diversity,⁴ there is the basic shared principle that we are all connected, and that intimate connection is not just theoretical: with practice it begins to become perceptual. That is, it is factual. From that comes love for all, sympathy for all, compassionate action towards all.

And when that principle is applied to economics, we get an economy based on sharing. There is nothing wrong with the creation of wealth, if it is done ethically, but wealth is meant for distribution. Not a crude egalitarianism which mandates that everyone have exactly the same, but an equality of opportunity, plus the provision of everyone's basic needs and comforts, above and beyond which others are free to create more personal wealth. Sharing, rather than hoarding, needs to be favoured, structurally.

What else flows from this *dharmic* idea of connectedness? A model of cooperation rather than competition. Yes, competition is part of life, it's the basis of sports and many games, it is often what motivates a person to better oneself; but in the modern system, which started in the West with the decline of Christian spirituality, competition has come to be seen as the basic driving force of life. Of course, there is one exception as this works itself out in the present

society: those with power and resources are assiduous in reducing the competition that they face, while encouraging competition for everyone else. But competition isn't the basic driving force of life, not even in the animal kingdom. Cooperation is far more important to social wellbeing than competition.

What else? Because we are either all interdependent or ultimately all one, we are responsible for the welfare of others, because my own welfare lies in the welfare of others. And therefore service to others and self-sacrifice have to be intrinsic parts of the new story on which society is founded.

When I was a young monk, I was surprised to hear the head of the monastery speak of sacrifice as a grand and glorious thing. I knew sacrifice as something morally necessary, but to me it meant doing without something I really wanted in order to give it to someone else; that is, 'sacrifice' meant loss and frustration; it also meant I wasn't worthy, ever, because others were always more worthy. But I learned that the head of the monastery had heard different stories about sacrifice, which made it something glorious and liberating to him, it was something which made him larger. That's another topic, but again, it comes down to stories, and some stories are truer than others. The glory of service and self-sacrifice are part of a better story, based on a universal truth.

There are other foundational ideas, springing from our common understanding of karma and of a universal moral order underlying the universe—that is, a morality not based on the likes and dislikes of a deity, but one that is broad and impersonal, part of the structure of the universe. Karma and this universal moral order also work themselves out at the economic level, but there is no time to discuss that now; the larger implications are easily enough understood anyway.

Now, let us go from broad principles to more specific ideas. In the interests of time, I will

simply list the main ideas that follow from the preceding discussion, without explicitly stating the connection to *dharmic* principles, such connections being fairly obvious:

- We need to re-establish the commons, broadly, with the understanding that the basic resources necessary to sustain life belong to the people and cannot be privatised by corporations.
- We need an economy that finds its health in stasis, in equilibrium, not in constant growth.
- Privilege of opportunity must be reined in, not through a crude egalitarianism of resources, but an equality of opportunity, plus the provision of everyone's basic needs.
- The financial sector must once again serve the simple and boring purpose it was meant to serve: providing available money to those who demonstrate that they can use it well.
- We must go back to a needs-based economy that is not dependent upon stimulating an artificial and constant sense of want. Those real needs are not just material: they can be aesthetic, intellectual, social, cultural, religious, and so on.
- Corporations must serve social needs, responsibly, with consequences for irresponsible behaviour, and their political power must be subordinated to the power of the citizenry.
- The mad rush to privatise knowledge—through patenting and copyrighting—must be reined in. All patents and copyrights must be restricted to a shorter time-frame, as they once were, allowing an inventor or creator to get monetary benefit, after which the knowledge becomes public domain. Results of research at public universities and government-funded institutions must go directly into the public domain. And the realms of

knowledge which are patentable must be restricted: absolutely no patenting of life-processes, period; no patenting of simple computer routines and algorithms; limits on the patenting and pricing of life-saving pharmaceuticals; and so on.


- A new philosophy of work is desperately needed. Work as experimentation with Reality, work as self-exploration and world-exploration, work as self-expression, work as a means for manifesting the glory of the Self in Hindu, Sikh, and Jaina terms or the glory of the Enlightened Mind in Buddhist terms—in other words, 'work as yoga'—is the need of the age.

In conclusion, let me state that experiments are already underway in many parts of the world, effecting these very ideas. Some will work, some won't—that's the nature of experimentation. Those that work will tend to spread, *if enough people see the need and value in them*. But even those experiments that don't work deserve our gratitude, because they also are part of the process, and we learn at least as much from mistakes as from successes.

I wish to mention a few in order to show the variety of experiments that are underway, even if most of them are not consciously 'dharma based'; however they do illustrate some principles that a dharma-based economy would recognise. This is not an endorsement of any of the programs, because I haven't looked deeply into all of them, but just a short and incomplete list of examples. Local currencies that keep money circulating within a community are being tried in many places; worker cooperatives and worker-owned businesses are being tried; sustainable communities—with various definitions of 'sustainable'—are sprouting; the locally-grown food movement is spreading; 'solidarity economies', local economies, Buddhist economies,

Gandhian economies, and gift economies are all being tried. The GNH or Gross National Happiness program in Bhutan—whose Program Director, Dr Tho, is sitting next to me, and whose Executive Director, Dr Saamdu Chettri, is sitting over there—is a wonderful example of an innovative project. Food forests, distributed power generation systems, the Zapatista movement in Mexico, the Ejido Movement in Mexico—unfortunately and unfairly ended in 1992, after nine decades, as a concession to US demands—Auroville in Puducherry, the original Kibbutz movement in Israel, the libertarian socialism of the Kurds in northern Syria, all of these and many more are signs of the awakening to the need for new social models.

Eventually society itself—the living whole—will promote what works for its own survival. Society is an organism, not a machine, and like an organism, it follows its own laws of growth, and has its own self-corrective processes, like an auto-immune system, which we must work with, not against or in ignorance of. Therefore evolution rather than revolution is the path forward. That is, society itself will decide what it needs. Our part is not to impose our solutions, but to recognise the general need, to sow

the non-theological, life-giving, experiential ideas of dharma, and to be open to solutions as they develop. Out of that the society of the future will flower, for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many: *bahujanahitaya, bahujanasukhaya*. 

Notes

1. Dharmacharya in the Zen lineage of Thich Naht Hanh, and also the Program Director of the Gross National Happiness (GNH) Centre, Bhutan.
2. This is the view of the great Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna.
3. And practically all economies now fall within the spectrum of capitalism. In the Soviet and Maoist systems, private ownership of capital was replaced by state ownership, which is really state capitalism—state-owned and state-planned economies as opposed to private enterprise systems. In a true socialist system, the workers in an enterprise collectively control production, distribution, and capital assets. Stalin instituted state capitalism and simply declared it socialism, and Mao followed his example.
4. The Jaina perspective here, though somewhat different from the Buddhist and Hindu-Sikh, can also be harmonised, but is not separately included in the interests of simplicity.





Danger, Beauty, and God-Intoxication: A Journey to Amarnath

Elizabeth Usha Harding

O Lord, if the blue mountain be ink, the ocean the inkpot, the branch of the heavenly [Parijata] tree be pen, the earth the writing leaf, and by taking these if the Goddess of Learning writes for eternity, even then, the limit of thy virtues will not be reached.¹

I HAVE LIVED WITH a picture of the Amarnath ice lingam on my wall for many years, and though I am a seasoned traveller and have made it a point to visit all the major places of pilgrimage in India, I never went to Kashmir. I thought a journey to Amarnath was beyond my reach, at least in this lifetime. The trek to the holy cave is strenuous and the political situation in Kashmir is mostly unstable.

In April 2016, my friend George called to let me know that he and his artist-partner Claudia were going to Kashmir and planned to visit Amarnath. I immediately expressed my concern on the difficulty of this journey, reminding him of his health problems. 'We'll take a helicopter,' said George and laughed. When he mentioned 'helicopter' a spark

went off in my head. I saw a green signal as it were, a possibility for me to visit the Lord at Amarnath.

'I'm coming with you,' I said. This was my chance of a lifetime. 'Of course,' was George's immediate reply. George was familiar with Kashmir having lived there for many years as a disciple and personal attendant to the well-known Shaivacharya Swami Lakshmanjoo. Moreover, he had all the contacts necessary to enrol me in the 2016 Sri Amarnath Yatra.

To me, Kashmir is the land of God, the land of Shiva—the land of learning, philosophy, poetry, music, and art. Swami Vivekananda in one of his letters called the Kashmir Valley 'Paradise on earth'.² After reading Sister Nivedita's *The Master as I Saw Him*, I had always longed to visit Kashmir and Amarnath.

Never had the Swami, in visiting a holy place, felt such spiritual exaltation. Afterwards he said to his European disciple, 'The image was the Lord Himself. It was all worship there. I never have been to anything so beautiful, so inspiring!' Later on, in

the circle of his brother-disciples and own disciples, he said dreamily: 'I can well imagine how this cave was first discovered. A party of shepherds, one summer day, must have lost their flocks and wandered in here in search of them. What must have been their feeling as they found themselves unexpectedly before this unmelting ice-Linga, white like camphor, with the vault itself dripping offerings of water over it for centuries.'³

There is some controversy about the discovery of the holy cave of Amarnath. Some say that this cave has been a Hindu destination of pilgrimage for thousands of years being mentioned in the ancient Kashmiri Sanskrit text *Rajatarangini*, while others say that this cave had been discovered not that many generations ago by a Muslim shepherd named Malik.

The valley of Kashmir, according to Hindu epics, was a big lake in ancient times. Kashyapa Rishi drained the water through a number of rivers and rivulets. Soon after, Bhrgu Rishi came on pilgrimage to the Himalayas and was the first to have the darshan of the holy cave of Amarnath.

So many stories are attributed to this cave. Mother Parvati asked Lord Shiva when and why he started wearing the *munda mala*, garland of skulls. 'Whenever you die, I add more heads to my *mala*,' replied Lord Shiva. 'Please tell me the reason why I die again and again but you are immortal,' asked Mother Parvati. 'If you want to know the secret of immortality, you will have to listen to the Amar Katha,' said Lord Shiva. He took Mother Parvati to a lonely place where no living being could overhear him tell this 'secret of secrets' and ultimately chose the Amarnath cave. Lord Shiva left Nandi at Pahalgam and released the crescent moon he carries on his forehead at Chandanwari. At the banks of Lake Sheshnag, Shiva released the snakes, left his son Ganesha at Mahagunas Parvat, and at Panchtarni, he left the life-giving five elements—earth, water, fire, air, and

space. After leaving all these behind, Lord Shiva entered the holy Amarnath cave and revealed the secret of immortality to Mother Parvati.

Nothing is perfect even in the world of gods. Lord Shiva took so many precautions to keep anyone other than Mother Parvati from hearing the secret of immortality, yet by chance, a pair of white pigeons dwelling in the cave overheard the secret and became immortal. To this day, pilgrims visiting Amarnath often report having seen a pair of white pigeons in the cave.

I booked my airline tickets for India and planned to arrive in Srinagar on Saturday, 16 July. George had already booked a helicopter to take us to Amarnath on 19 July, which happened to be Guru Purnima. Envisioning the trip to Kashmir, my heart was filled with anticipation. Beside George and Claudia, my dear friends John and Denise Hughes and their daughter Shanna were also going to be in Srinagar. They are all Swami Lakshmanjoo's close disciples who, after the master's passing, founded the Kashmir Shaiva Fellowship in Los Angeles. They have dedicated their lives to translating and publishing books of Swami Lakshmanjoo's teachings on Kashmir Shaivism. I happily accepted when they invited me to stay at Swami Lakshmanjoo's ashrama in Srinagar.

Everything was perfect until the night before I left Laguna Beach for India. My friend Sang-eeta called me and told me that the Amarnath yatra, pilgrimage, had been stopped, and Kashmir was under curfew after violent protests in the wake of the killing of a militant commander and his associates. Everything was uncertain. Would I be able to fly into Srinagar, and would we be able to proceed to Amarnath?

I questioned whether to stay in the US or proceed with my India itinerary. I'm glad that the call to Amarnath proved stronger than the hesitation in my brain. After arriving at the Delhi airport, I was waiting for my connecting flight to

Srinagar when Shanna unexpectedly appeared. It was a relief to be on the same flight. Shanna is a strong woman who spent her childhood in Srinagar. Two policemen backed off from stopping us exiting the Srinagar airport when Shanna replied to their inquiries in fluent Kashmiri.

It was a bit like a high-speed race you see in the movies as the taxi driver expertly manoeuvred past rocks and razor-sharp concertina wire on the road. All shops on both sides of the road were closed, and the only people on the road were military and men throwing rocks at them. Though it was an eerie scene, nothing could take away the beauty of Srinagar with its majestic mountains and timeless, serene-looking Dal Lake. We passed many soldiers, and curiously enough, one vendor pushing an ice-cream cart. Then, just when we were about to be stopped by soldiers, the driver turned into a small lane. We had arrived at Swami Lakshmanjoo's ashrama.

Swami Lakshmanjoo was a mystic master of the ancient tradition of Kashmir Shaivism. He was expert in bringing understanding to one's limited knowledge and letting you get a glimpse into the nature of God's divine play. In Swami Lakshmanjoo's words:

The cycles of bondage and liberation are both one with Lord Śiva. It is only his trick that we think that some souls are bound in ignorance while others are elevated. As only Lord Śiva exists, there is not any second thing that could cover or bind him. It is only his play that we think that this covering of diversity actually exists as a separate reality. There is not a second being or reality. His trick, therefore, is *our* trick. Why? Because we are Lord Śiva. We have concealed ourselves in order to find ourselves. This is his play, and therefore it is our play.⁴

I love this teaching because it reminds me of Swami Vivekananda. Sri Ramakrishna predicted that Narendranath, Swamiji's pre-monastic name, would no longer hold on to his body when he

remembered who he really was. When Swamiji went to Amarnath and saw Lord Shiva in his full glory, he became transformed. He remembered.

'And if Amarnath was an awesome experience for him, more so than Amarnath was the Swami to Sister Nivedita: so saturated had he become with the Presence of the Great God that for days after he could speak of nothing else. Shiva was all in all.'⁵

Meeting With A Shaivite Master

Perhaps I should explain how I met Swami Lakshmanjoo. He came to Los Angeles to see his Western disciples in 1991, and one Sunday morning in May, my mother who was visiting me from Vienna, Austria, and I went to pay our respects. It was a large house in the Wilshire area. There were people standing about while others were sitting quietly in a corner. Everybody seemed busy with themselves. Assuming that the Swami was going to give a lecture, I asked one lady about the program. 'What program?' she asked. 'We don't know what Swamiji will do in the next five minutes.'

I thought of Sri Ramakrishna. He also did not follow a fixed program or planned lectures. Nobody could predict what he would do next or when he would go into samadhi.

Not knowing what else to do, I sat down cross-legged in the large living room, and my mother sat down on the couch behind me. Swami Lakshmanjoo slowly entered the living room. Using a cane to support himself, he walked to a couch on the other side of the room. He sat down facing us. Though he looked old and frail, he was strikingly handsome. He wore a brace around his neck. Without moving or saying a word, he sat on the couch looking at us for the longest time. Just when I thought that he would never talk, Swami Lakshmanjoo said something to a devotee sitting next to a harmonium. Promptly kirtan began, and sweet sounds of devotion reverberated in the room.

Then something happened that I will never forget. Swami Lakshmanjoo began to look animated, and suddenly, he tore off the neck brace with one swooping motion. He sat for a while, and then abruptly, he tossed his cane into a corner and got up. With arms upraised, Swami Lakshmanjoo started to dance. Keeping rhythm with the bhajan he put full weight on each foot as he danced. Then he stopped before a devotee who stood near him. Swami Lakshmanjoo bent down and clapped his hands in front of the man's knees, and clapping again and again, he moved up from the man's knees to his head. He turned and danced again with vigour. One by one, he stopped at people in the room clapping his hands from their knees to their head.

I had never seen anything like that. As the Swami danced closer to where I was sitting, I was wondering if I, too, who was just an observer, would get this treatment. When Swami Lakshmanjoo danced before me, I forgot to think, forgot who I was and everything else. His eyes looked blue and deep like the mountain lakes I had seen in the Austrian Alps. His face emanated ecstatic joy as tears flowed down his cheeks. I barely remember that Swami Lakshmanjoo touched my hands prompting me to stand up. My body flew up from a seated position as if it were a feather. I watched him clap his hands in front of me, and when he moved to the next person, I sat back down dumbfounded. That day, I was rather proud of my mother. Even though she had been a devout Catholic all her life, she was open enough to appreciate Swami Lakshmanjoo's ecstatic behaviour.

Swami Lakshmanjoo lost the ability to walk soon after the day of the dance, and he left his mortal body a few months later in New Delhi at the age of eighty-four.

Years later, George told me that Swami Lakshmanjoo's ecstatic dance on that day was not a common occurrence. Swami Lakshmanjoo

revealed to his devotees that he had had a vision of Goddess Durga which prompted his excitement. 'How fortunate is America that Durga is present in this country', Swami Lakshmanjoo said, 'I am surprised. It's not a partial form of Durga. I saw a full installation of Durga including Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ganesha, and Kartikeya.'

Kashmir at a Boil

Many years passed since 1991 on my arrival in Srinagar on 16 July 2016. I had seen photographs and videos of Swami Lakshmanjoo at his ashrama in Srinagar and often thought that I'd like to visit. Now I was here but at a most inconvenient time. Though the ashrama atmosphere was spiritual and peaceful, there was turmoil outside. The people of Kashmir were suffering: curfew—no travelling on the streets, no phone connections, no internet connections. Only limited food and medical supplies could be obtained. ATMs were running out of money and garbage was piling up.

The next day, on 17 July, things looked especially grim. Listening to an old, battery-operated transistor radio, we got the news that thousands of pilgrims on their way to Amarnath were stopped in Jammu. The road via Anantnag was too dangerous for travel. Many people had been killed due to unrest. According to our itinerary, we would have to leave for Pahalgam on this day to be in time to catch the helicopter for Panchtarni early morning on 19 July, Guru Purnima. To make things worse, George had developed a very bad cough, and I was wondering whether he would be fit enough to travel.

When the ashrama was quiet in the afternoon, I slipped into Swami Lakshmanjoo's temple in the ashrama compound and sat before the Shiva lingam that Swami Lakshmanjoo himself had worshipped. 'I have a request', I said, hoping Swami Lakshmanjoo could hear me. 'I've come a long way and waited so many years. Please help

me to see Lord Shiva at Amarnath. Please clear the obstacles.' Later, when I joined the others drinking Kashmiri tea on the veranda, I saw that someone had left a photo of Swami Lakshmanjoo on the couch leaning against a partially covered paper. On the portion of the paper I could see were the words: 'Request Granted.'

I felt confident that everything was going to be alright when we left Srinagar for Pahalgam around 10.30 p.m. Driving was not possible during the day because of the curfew. In the dark car, George's iPad dimly lit Claudia's face as she searched for a file. I could hear Swami Lakshmanjoo chanting a shloka when I started chanting the *Hanuman Chalisa*, asking Hanuman for protection. I always do that before going on a trip.

The driver took us quickly through dark, deserted streets until we reached the highway. There were many cars and trucks taking advantage of the night, which since the onset of the curfew had become the only safe time for driving. Somewhere along the route, George asked the driver to stop before a brightly-lit mosque and turned to me asking: 'Do you have a hundred rupees? We should make an offering here. Whenever Swamiji travelled to Pahalgam or Jammu, he always stopped at this mosque and made an offering.'

When we turned north onto National Highway 501 leading to Pahalgam, the streets were deserted, and we came across very few cars. We saw razor-sharp barbed wire, rocks on the road, and periodically, we saw soldiers standing in groups. We were stopped a few times, and soldiers carrying rifles peeked into the car through the windows. When we told them that we are on a yatra to Amarnath, they let us proceed.

In August 2000 about thirty-two people including Amarnath pilgrims and police officers were killed in Pahalgam during a terrorist attack. As a consequence, we had to get out of the car at a checkpoint just before reaching Pahalgam. Our

luggage went through X-ray and everybody was searched for guns and other weapons. Nobody seemed to mind being frisked.

We arrived at our hotel around 2.30 a.m., and though I was very tired, I could not help but notice how charming and clean our room was. In the morning when I stepped out of the room and onto the veranda, I was greeted by crisp, fresh air and a breathtaking view of high mountains covered with pine forests. Looking past the hotel's meticulously-kept green lawn and beautiful willow trees, I could see the Lidder River and hear its roar as it rushed through the valley.

At breakfast I noticed that we were the only guests in the entire hotel. While the others moved about a bit, I spent most of the day sitting on the veranda in front of our room and staring at a majestic mountain in the distance. Time passed. I listened to my head arguing with my heart. *Om Namah Shivaya!* Here I was in Pahalgam. *Om Namah Shivaya!* My brain said: 'After all these years avoiding Kashmir and its political conflicts, I had to come during a most dangerous time.' *Om Namah Shivaya!* My heart said, 'This is the right time; this is when I am supposed to be here.' *Om Namah Shivaya!* 'Spiritual power often manifests strongly during conflict.' *Om Namah Shivaya!* 'The Bhagavadgita was not spoken during a time of peace.' *Om Namah Shivaya! Om Namah Shivaya! Om Namah Shivaya! Om Namah Shivaya!* I watched a helicopter flying in the direction of the beautiful mountain I had been staring at and felt a tremendous longing to see Lord Shiva at Amarnath.

Pahalgam, at 7,000 feet, is the base camp for the annual yatra to the Amarnath cave shrine. The yatra trek runs along the river to Chandanwari, and from there, the trek becomes steep and is accessible only by foot or pony. One has to climb to Pissu Top and then trek to the mountain lake of Sheshnag which is close to 12,000 feet high. From Sheshnag one has to climb a steep height

across the 14,000-foot Mahagunas Pass and then descend to the meadowland of Panchtarni. At the foot of Bhairava Mount, there are five rivers that flow at Panchtarni. Many pilgrims bathe in these five rivers before trekking the last four miles to the holy cave of Amarnath which is situated at 13,000 feet. Altogether the trek from Pahalgam to Amarnath is thirty-one miles long and takes most pilgrims three days to complete. There is a shorter route via Sonamarg and Baltal, Domail, and Barari Marg which is only nine miles long. However, few pilgrims are fit enough to trek this route because it is extremely steep and dangerous.

Swami Vivekananda tried to get to Amarnath via Sonamarg but had to turn back due to bad weather and landslides. This turned out to be fortunate for Sister Nivedita because Swamiji let her join him on the pilgrimage to Amarnath via the Pahalgam-Chandanwari route.

Sister Nivedita wrote in her memoirs:

Through scenes of indescribable beauty, three thousand of us ascended the valleys that opened before us as we went. The first day we camped in a pine-wood; the next, we had passed the snow-line, and pitched our tents beside a frozen river. That night, the great camp fire was made of juniper, and the next evening, at still greater heights, the servants had to wander many miles, in search of this scanty fuel. At last the regular pathway came to an end, and we had to scramble up and down, along goat-paths, on the face of steep declivities, till we reached the boulder-strewn gorge, in which the Cave of Amarnath was situated.⁶

Lord Shiva at Amarnath

At my age, I could not have undertaken the three-day trek, and my only option to see the Lord at Amarnath was to take a helicopter. We got to the helicopter pad early on the morning of Guru Purnima. A few people were ahead of us, and we watched as they boarded a helicopter. Six people besides the pilot can be seated in the helicopter.

When it was our turn, we had to split up. George and I boarded the first helicopter. I thought the helicopter ride would be scary, but on the contrary, it was exhilarating and beautiful. I looked down at the pine trees and then watched as we flew past glaciers of eternal ice. I saw the beautiful, translucent blue Sheshnag Lake sparkling like a rare jewel faceted between snow-peaked mountains. Soon after, we landed at the helipad at Panchtarni.

George decided to wait at the helipad for the others to arrive in the next helicopter. 'I have to go,' I said to George. 'Lord Shiva is calling. I'll see you all at the cave.'

Somehow, deep in my heart, I always knew that I had to make this journey alone—at least the last leg of it. I passed the security area around the helipad and started to walk along a muddy path. It had rained a lot over the past few days, and the mud was deep and stuck to my shoes.

Soon I was surrounded by many men who all offered their services to take me to Amarnath. I looked around. All the way up one mountain were men waiting with their horses for pilgrim customers. Palanquin-bearers were sitting around waiting to be hired by pilgrims who never came. These men are all Muslims who depend on Hindu pilgrims to hire them. Money earned during the Amarnath yatra season helps them to get by during the harsh winter.

One old man agreed to take me to the cave for twelve-hundred rupees—a fair price according to the Amarnath Yatra Shrine Board. He whistled and motioned up the mountain until a young boy brought a white horse to where we were standing. I was glad to see that the horse was not too tall. Just as I was contemplating how I should approach getting up on the horse, I was expertly hoisted up onto the saddle by the old man and the young boy. 'Auntie,' said the boy. 'Give me your bag. I'll carry it for you.' I was grateful. This way I could hold on to the saddle with both hands.

With steady gait, the boy began to walk up the muddy path, expertly leading the horse past rocks.

There were only a few people on the path to Amarnath. I saw one sadhu clad in ochre, walking barefoot. He had one bad leg and was limping, but that did not stop him from briskly walking on. Once in a while pilgrims returning from the holy cave greeted me with a hearty 'Jai Bhole!' or 'Har Har Mahadev!' I saw three middle-aged Indian ladies dressed in kurtas panting for breath. They did not stop walking, and with each step, they said, 'Jai Shiva!' I saw smiling faces and I saw exhausted faces. At almost every turn of the path, I saw soldiers sitting or standing, keeping watch.

The path was steep. Looking down, I saw a river with milky blue water flowing about 1,000 feet below. The boy was leading the horse with great confidence, and I wasn't worried that the horse may slip even when we passed a difficult rocky terrain. I was thankful. This boy and this horse were taking me to Lord Shiva. In retrospect, I wish I could remember this Muslim boy's name. He became very dear to me.

When we reached Sangam, a Jammu and Kashmir police officer stopped us. 'You have to get off the horse here and walk the rest of the way,' he said to me in perfect English. It was still a walk of almost two miles to the cave—mostly over ice and slippery terrain. I asked the officer to please let me continue riding the horse a bit further. The officer was adamant. 'No, everybody has to get off their horses here,' he said. Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, a man appeared in army fatigues and started arguing with the police officer. 'She is a special guest of the Indian army,' he told the police officer. They argued for quite a while. At last, the police officer gave me permission to continue, and the boy, the horse, and I resumed our journey towards Amarnath.

Walking slowly over snow-covered mud and ice, the horse carefully avoided holes in the ice.

Some holes were so big that you could see a river flowing underneath. We passed a big rock next to the river, and I was wondering whether this was the place where Swamiji bathed before entering the holy cave. Soon after, multi-coloured tents that pilgrims can rent as well as army and police tents lined the path. At one tent, we were stopped again, and a man said something in Hindi about a 'mobile and camera.' Luckily, I didn't understand him and kept my mobile and camera.

We arrived at the steps leading to the holy cave. The boy helped me get off the horse and said, 'Auntie, I'll wait here for you.' I started walking up a few steps and soon became aware of the high altitude. I stopped, caught my breath, and walked up another few steps. I was glad to see that I was not the only one who had to rest. Even people younger than me had to stop for a while. About half way up, there was a tent where pilgrims left their shoes. The steps didn't feel cold at all as I continued barefoot. The last long flight of steps seemed the hardest. There were pilgrims holding on to the railing while others sat on the steps to catch their breath. The cave was near, and though I was out of breath, I pushed on, driven by longing and adrenaline.

As soon as I reached the level walkway inside the holy cave, I felt completely overwhelmed. The combination of exhaustion, high altitude, shortness of breath, and intense emotion as I was imbibing the sheer power of the place made me stop. There were only a few more steps up to the ice lingam, but I had to sit down. It couldn't have been more intense if I had walked straight into Lord Shiva's arms. Tears were rolling down from the corners of my eyes as I sat by myself on a green wooden bench in the cave. A policeman walked by, looking at me as I sat there helplessly overcome with feeling.

I don't remember how long I sat there. Finally, I composed myself and took out the bag with cashews and raisins I had brought from America

as an offering for Lord Shiva. There remained only a few steps up through a brass gate, and I was before the Lord. The ice lingam had melted quite a bit and only one-third still remained. It did not matter to me that the ice lingam was not high. My heart was so full. I think if the divine vibration in the cave would have been any stronger, I would have fainted. I handed the bag of cashews and raisins to one tall, young priest for offering.

For a moment I thought that the priest might not give me enough prasad to bring back to all the devotees in the US. I reached past a few people to get the attention of the priest. When I failed to get his attention, I took out my mobile and showed the priest a photo of our deity, Mother Dakshineswari Kali of Laguna Beach. All of a sudden, there was a huge commotion. Everybody wanted to see Mother. I held my mobile high so that all the people could see Mother and suddenly realised that I was holding it up to show Lord Shiva in the ice lingam. Again, I got overwhelmed and had to go back down the steps and sit on the bench to compose myself.

The priest came down the steps to hand me the prasad that I had forgotten. Another priest came and filled my arms with more prasad and put holy ash on my forehead. The policeman came and put wooden shoes on my feet. 'You must be cold,' he said. An old man carrying a small bucket used a ladle to pour hot rice pudding prasad, with lots of saffron into a paper cup and handed it to me. So much love, so much kindness.

The Amarnath cave is very high and wide but not as deep as I had imagined. Some pigeons were flying high in the cave. I was still sitting on the bench and felt a bit self-conscious for having shown so much emotion. Then I remembered that even Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, the eleventh President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, became emotional when he visited Amarnath.

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, the present President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, had once told me that Swami Gambhirananda, who was usually very reticent about his spiritual experiences, said that he saw Sri Ramakrishna seated in the ice lingam.

When my friends arrived in the holy cave, they also got wooden shoes to wear as they walked up the steps to the shrine of the ice lingam. Wooden shoes are the only footwear allowed in the cave, and the priests, police, and staff who have to stand on the cold ground for a long time wear these shoes.

There are three ice lingams in the cave. The large ice lingam is worshipped as Lord Shiva. The ice lingam next to Lord Shiva is worshipped as Mother Parvati and next to the Mother is Ganesha. The area is protected by a grill, most probably to prevent devotees tossing items at the lingams.

I noticed that George did not look well. He looked intently at the ice lingam, and then he and Claudia chanted the Aghora mantra for quite some time: '*Aghorebhyo 'tha ghorebhyo aghoraghoratarebhyah, sarvatah sharvah sarvebhyo namaste rudrarupebhyah*'.

Swami Lakshmanjoo gave two meanings of this mantra. 'I bow to all Shaktis which are embodiments of Rudras from all sides and always: those are Aghora Shaktis, Ghora Shaktis, and Ghoratari Shaktis.'⁷ And the other meaning he gave was: 'O Lord Shiva! You alone transform yourself into all forms, into the forms of the powers of Rudra as Aghora, the enlightening and uplifting energy; Ghoratari, the frightful darkening energy which pushes one down, and Ghora, the energy which keeps one fixed, neither rising nor falling. These forms, embodied in Rudrashiva are helpful to the aspirant who is aware and frightful for the one who is not, pushing him down and down.'

More people started to come into the inner cave and the friendly priest gestured for us to

move. At least two hours must have passed since I first entered the holy cave. I could never have stayed this long during normal times. The problems in Kashmir prevented most pilgrims from reaching Amarnath. On peak days, I was told, there is a long line of devotees standing on the steps, and it is not unusual for them to wait for two hours before they can have darshan of the ice lingam for just a minute. The most auspicious time for the Amarnath yatra is the month of Shravan which starts with the full moon in July—Guru Purnima—and ends with the full moon in August—Rakhi, Shravan, Purnima.

On our way down from the holy cave, one old sadhu unexpectedly stopped George. 'Your knees are not good,' he said, and with a quick gesture, he vigorously rubbed George's knees. 'Knees are okay now!' said the sadhu and quickly disappeared. George told me later that, in fact, a lingering pain in his knees subsided after the incident with the sadhu. We walked to the end of the steps and stopped at a tent where people were eating. There is no charge for food at Amarnath, though one may leave a donation. My mind was flying high and I did not feel like eating. I stood at the tent entrance looking up at Amarnath when I heard a voice next to me.

'Auntie, I am looking for you,' said the Muslim boy who brought me in on the horse. 'Come quickly. It will rain.' I waved to the others and followed the boy. He carefully took my hand lest I should fall on the slippery path. When the path got steeper, he stopped at a stall selling trinkets and said: 'Auntie, wait here. I'll bring the horse.' I watched the Muslim shopkeeper cover trinkets, Hindu deities, and prasad he had displayed for sale with a plastic cloth. It started to rain a bit. The shopkeeper motioned to me. 'Come stand under my tent and put your bag on the table so it won't get wet,' the shopkeeper said with a friendly smile.

The boy appeared with the horse, and I made

a sad attempt to get into the saddle. 'Auntie jump,' said the boy. The shopkeeper kindly helped to hoist me onto the horse and tucked in my plastic raincoat around the saddle. The weather was changing rapidly as we started on our way back to Panchtarni. A strong wind had picked up and the rain felt sharp on my face, but I experienced too much joy to feel cold. Steady and unperturbed, the young boy walked through mud and ice, perfectly guiding the horse back to Panchtarni.

The innocent, loving kindness this boy had bestowed on me touched me deeply. I felt that he was my family, and I was not just a rhetorical aunt. I wanted to make him happy and all I had to give was my gratitude and some money. I handed him a nice tip of five hundred rupees note as a gift before I got off the horse in Panchtarni. He held the money and looked perplexed. 'Oh no, auntie,' he said. At this point, the old man who owned the horse appeared and I paid him the agreed amount of twelve-hundred rupees. The boy was still holding the five-hundred rupees note, not knowing what to do. When I put the note into his shirt pocket and said, 'Dakshina,' I was rewarded with a smile I shall treasure for a long time.

I realised that George was quite ill when he reached Panchtarni. He had high fever, and his cough sounded worse. It was cold and raining heavily. We needed to get him back to the hotel in Pahalgam as soon as possible. Though there were quite a few people in front of us waiting for a helicopter, people at the helipad put George on the next helicopter. Claudia and I were lucky to get on the last helicopter to Pahalgam for the day, and we got to sit in front next to the pilot. The most amazing scene presented itself right in front of my eyes—to the left and to the right were majestic mountains, silent witnesses of Lord Shiva's glory. I wished I could have made myself very large, so large that I could have spread my arms and embraced these beautiful mountains clad in eternal ice.

Praying for Divine Intervention


We stayed in Pahalgam for three days waiting for George to get well enough for the return journey to Srinagar. Due to the curfew, I stayed in the hotel and had ample time to reflect. This area of Kashmir is predominantly Muslim. I thought of the cooperation between Hindus and Muslims I had witnessed at Amarnath and wondered if this would be possible in all of Kashmir.

‘It’s not a Hindu versus Muslim problem,’ said the hotel manager, who is Muslim. ‘It’s a Kashmiri problem. Everybody here is suffering. The hotel is empty. This tourist season is a loss and we may not recover for the next three years.’

The way the manager talked about suffering touched me. He had the stoic expression of someone who is used to suffering. I learned that the distinguished man who served us meals so attentively was not a waiter at all. He was a professional trekker but had no clients. He told me of a French man he trekked with. ‘He had a large camera and wanted to take pictures of the Pahalgam Ramakrishna Ashrama,’ said the trekker. ‘You have to hike up the mountain for about an hour or so or take a pony. Nobody lives there; it’s mostly a big rock with writing on it.’ I wondered if this rock relates to Swamiji’s travels in the region.

Hindu pilgrims visiting Vaishno Devi and Amarnath have a significant impact on Kashmir’s economy, but Kashmir’s troubles are not only of an economic nature. They are complex. There are political clashes; Kashmir is a disputed territory administered by three countries—India, Pakistan, and China. There are clashes by separatists who want Kashmir to be autonomous. There are religious clashes—Kashmir is an important region for Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists. And to add intensity, self-interested parties instil hatred in good peoples’ hearts. As a result, senseless violence kills too many individuals who could have lived productive lives.

One thing all people in Kashmir have in common, whether they are the security forces, the militants, or the general public who live there—they are all suffering. The taxi that took us back to Srinagar had a broken rear window. It was a new Toyota, and I was curious how the window got broken. The driver explained that a man standing on the street threw a rock at his car because he was driving Hindu pilgrims. Most Amarnath pilgrims leaving Pahalgam joined a military convoy to take them down the mountain over dangerous roads. We passed a long line of taxis and felt sad that people had to take such precautions.

My heart goes out to the Kashmiri people who are stuck between warring parties, who just want to go on with their normal lives and who suffer with seemingly no end in sight. My empathy goes to all the disappointed pilgrims who were stopped and could not proceed to the holy cave of Amarnath. I am also sorry that I was not able to visit the Ramakrishna Mission due to the curfew in Srinagar. I pray to Sri Ramakrishna to turn hatred into respect and understanding and bring peace and harmony to the beautiful but troubled region of Kashmir. *Om Namah Shivaya!* 

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Vedanta Answers

Swami Smaranananda

(Continued from the December 2016 issue)

[Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, has been asked various questions regarding various aspects of spiritual life by the young and old alike, over a period of time. This is a collection of such questions and his answers to them—*Editor*.]

QUESTION: Our scriptures say that humans take birth in this world due to their previous karma. One who has done bad deeds comes back to this world again and again. Even in other religions like Christianity, humans are told to be sinners, and the Father in heaven will rescue them. Are we all sinners as against being of divine nature?

Answer: Virtue and vice determine the results of karma in later births. No one is a sinner in the ultimate sense. Our divine nature will assert itself if we live a virtuous life.

Question: What is desire?

Answer: You know what desire is, for you experience it. Wanting to attain or acquire something, which you do not have, is desire.

Question: What is the difference between religion and ethics?

Answer: Ethics is only morality whereas religion is an effort to attain God—the ultimate goal of life.

Question: What is the difference between morality and character?

Answer: Morality is living in consonance with right behaviour, not doing harm to others. When that becomes your habit or nature, it is character.

Question: Is criticising a wrongdoer good?

Answer: It depends upon the circumstances. Discretion should be used. Our purpose is to work out a solution, not to create enmity.

Question: Sometimes, we are forced to do something which we feel is not good. In such a case, should we change our character or stick to our character, even though we might lose something?

Answer: Character is more important. We should not do anything to get immediate success. Our reaction should be beneficial to both the parties concerned.

Question: How can parents and society play a role in cultivating human values?

Answer: Real education begins at home. Training should begin when the child is impressionable. Parents and society would gain by this, for a society is great where the highest ideals become practical, as Swamiji said.

Question: How do we distinguish between competitiveness and jealousy?

Answer: Jealousy is negative quality and benefits none. Healthy competition without jealousy and hatred lead to peace and understanding.

Question: As you discussed, there are situations in which values have to be taken in a different context, but those situations need subtle judgment, which people may not have. How should one handle such situations?

Answer: Think with a free peaceful mind. That will lead you to a right judgement.

Question: We should feel proud of social values of Indian culture, but does that mean that all other cultures of the world are bad?

Answer: No culture is good or bad by itself. We have to examine whether a particular aspect of culture leads to peace and refinement or to hatred, violence, and chaos.

Question: What values did Sri Krishna display in the Mahabharata? It seems to me that he was always flexible with values. Isn't that wrong?

Answer: Sri Krishna was a great prophet, who could see the past and the future. Read the Gita carefully. You will get the answers to your question.

Question: Please tell us about the thought process. What is the meaning of the statement: 'A guided mind never makes a blunder'? What is a guided mind? Does it mean a mind that practises meditation?

Answer: Ask this question to those who are teaching 'guided meditation'. Studying great lives will give you an idea about what is right and what is wrong.

Question: When inside an examination hall, my mind sometimes thinks in a wrong manner. After coming out of the examination hall the same mind tells me that I could have given the exam in a better way and the mind criticises me for not thinking properly at that time. What should I do?

Answer: You will have to prepare for the examination not on the very previous day, but much earlier. On the examination day keep your mind free and tranquil. That would help you to get the right answers in the examination hall.

Question: Some monks have a clean shaven head. In some sects, they keep a beard and long hair. Why is it so?

Answer: Each sect has its own practice. Some go according to one's own convenience. There is no hard and fast rule about it.

Question: Sometimes it is said that to get over the lower instincts like lust and greed, we must go through them and when we experience all this, and when our mind requires something more,

we turn to spirituality. But you said that these feelings tend to keep us at that lower level and we may not rise up to higher spiritual truths. Could you kindly clarify this?

Answer: Our mind can go upwards or downwards depending on various factors. If our ideal is to travel towards the truth, the lower tendencies of the mind will have to be given a higher direction. Giving a free rein to them will bring misery in its turn. Fix your goal first and then begin training the mind.

Question: The *jivatma*, the individual soul, is like ocean water taken in a pot. The *paramatma*, the supreme soul, is like the ocean—both are the same, that is water. But where did the pot come from? Why did it come? Can we find the answer staying in the pot?

Answer: The *jivatma* has not come from anywhere. It is there all the time. The pot is incidental—what is called *maya* in Vedantic parlance. But the pot can be got rid of by breaking it. Then the water inside the pot and outside it becomes one, and the soul's journey comes to an end.

Question: How can the strength of mind or will-power be improved to overcome the obstacle of disease?

Answer: If you have a goal in life, you can control the mind and train it not to worry too much about diseases and other problems in life. Nevertheless you will have to follow basic health rules.

Question: Why does one need religion? One can live a moral life without subscribing to any religion. Today, isn't religious fundamentalism doing more harm than anything else?

Answer: Religious fundamentalism is like a political party. It has nothing to do with spiritual life. Moral life will not be always possible without a spiritual goal. But if you don't feel the need for God or religion, well try it out, how far you can succeed.

(To be continued)

Saga of Epic Proportions

Swami Sandarshananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

IN HER SUBSEQUENT LETTER to Macleod on the very next day Nivedita alludes to Swamiji's comment about Bose and her visit to Belur Math with the Boses. She was obviously so pleased and elated to have the circumstances developed in that manner, indicating clearly a nice feeling prevailing between Swamiji and Bose. She wrote:

I told him [Swamiji] of Dr. Bose—just as I told you last week—every detail, and he said 'Yet that boy almost worshiped me for 3 days—in a week's time he would be my man.' 'Yes' I said 'he does worship' (if you only knew with what a depth of reverence and self-restraint that exquisite worship is given, dear Yum!) 'Yes' said the King [Swamiji], 'and those are always the people who make the fuss about the worship of the Personal. They don't understand themselves—and they hate in others what they know *they* are struggling against!' Sudden light. If I can get my friend once to the Math before His Royalty departs—if—if—if—Sri Ram Krishna helps me—and if not, faith I'll tell himself the diagnosis one fine day.¹³

It's a long letter which she takes days to finish, bringing in myriads of messages and things for discussions. She says in it after a while:

But my heart failed me yesterday when I saw how frail he [Swamiji] was. And since Yogananda died I have realised—oh how I have realised—Yum Dear it is all very well to be heroic but that thought [of Swamiji's dying] makes me a coward through and through. I *tremble* at the whisper of it. It would be the blotting out of God. But for him, Peace!

Then he had some special fish to cook—would I come to lunch today?—and it ended in my coming straight back and on to the Boses and asking them to go with me—and we are going up to tea!!!—So you see Sri R. K. *did* help! (1.114).

When she came with the Boses in the evening she was sad to sense Swamiji truly out of sorts. She therefore continued:

We have been. I love the Boses and I loved to have them there—and the King was his own dear self, but it was the perverse self a little. The fact is he was not really well. I noticed him feeling his chest every now and then, and I could see that he had not got over Yesterday's depression. I went down to make the tea tray ready—and stood talking with one of the younger of Sri Ram Krishna's disciples—such a fine man! And he said gravely, 'But I must tell you, Sister, it has been my observation that in this country at least, great men never never live long.'—The fact is Yum I am frightened. My old terror that he will never go West is on me and I am haunted by the Madras prophecy 'in 3 years'—Yum Yum Yum. If only you were here. I made this man promise if anything happened to send for me in time. And I shall make the others too—any time day or night (1.115).

Along with the worry about Bose's future her heart was never at rest from the worry of Swamiji's poor condition compounded by the passing of his dear brother disciple Swami Yogananda. She repeatedly falls back on her fear of losing Swamiji and tells in the letter. She accordingly doesn't

like to remain out of his easy reach at all. Before concluding she tries to say how she, Miss Macleod, and Mrs Bull are bonded together in Swamiji in their wholehearted submission to him and the work devolves on them in any case, with regard to his expectations. She says:

Only don't say I need a change and must go away at once—for while he is alive and here, I will not stir out of reach of him—I could not bear it—I worship—idolise—love him—I dare not risk his wanting me and not being there. It is terrible to realise how my worship must have grown with every minute of this year though. ... Oh thank God Yum darling—we know each other now—you and the Granny [Mrs Bull] and I—and whatever happens—here in this little corner our own special work is now begun—and the life that was promised to him when he fell ill is actually in his hands—thanks to you—over and over again—thanks to you (I.116).

Lastly she tells what she did with Mrs Bose after the tea party: 'Mrs. Bose and I went all over the grounds and down on to our grassy bank by the water—and I told her to remember that you were invisibly present with us—that you always came in and went out with me whenever I went there. So you and Mrs. Bull—dear Dr. Bose's special shrine were not forgotten—and never are' (ibid.).

Clearly, Nivedita was intensely pulling Bose in to the center of the circle of the four, namely Swamiji, herself, Mrs Bull and Miss Macleod by an inexorable gravitational force of pure love and



Margaret Noble, Aged Seventeen;
Photograph Taken on 27 June 1884

affection for a lofty cause of common interest of India's rejuvenation in the realm of science. One can have a neat picture from this letter how wisely Nivedita was proceeding to achieve her purpose, keeping her conscience erect and her heart open. It shows one the fact that she was of a rare mettle, legitimately deserving Swamiji's keen attention. Dr J C Bose was full of gratitude and affection for her. He was clear that the unconditional support and protection he had actively received in his life and works from her till to her last was humanly impossible for

any other person from among his well-wishers. When there was an endeavour to prepare an authentic biography of Sister Nivedita he wrote to her sister Mrs Wilson on 9 November 1911—'No one who knows the real state of things will realise how much the cause of Indian Nationality owes to Nivedita's selfless devotion and long suffering.'¹⁴ He had given a wholehearted assurance to her that he would provide all information to Lizelle Reymond—Nivedita's first French biographer—and Jean Herbert regarding Nivedita's help to him.

(To be continued)

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BALABODHA

Ancient Wisdom Made Easy

Vedanta

LET US TRY TO UNDERSTAND the meaning of the word ‘Vedanta’. The word ‘Vedanta’ is made up of two words, *veda* and *anta*. Let us see the meaning of each of these words, one by one. ‘Vedanta’ is originally a Sanskrit word and so we need to understand something about the nature of this language. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root. In Sanskrit too, this is the case.

The word *veda* is derived from the root *vid*. So, to understand the meaning of the word *veda*, we should understand the different meanings of its stem *vid*. Ancient masters of Sanskrit tell us that *vid* has five meanings: to know; to be; to obtain; to think or consider; and to feel, to tell, or to dwell upon. When to this root *vid*, the suffix *ghaw* is added, according to the rules of Sanskrit grammar, the root *vid* transforms into the word *veda*. The word *veda* conveys the means through which any of the meanings of the root *vid* is attained. Therefore, *veda* can be used for expressing the means through which any of the earlier mentioned five things are obtained.

So, *veda* can be used for denoting something through which a person knows something. It can also be used to denote the very act of having known something or having acquired mastery of something. It can be also used to say that someone has become something or is something, that is, to express the status of a person. It can also mean that a person has achieved or obtained something. This word can

also be used to denote that someone is thinking, considering, or analysing something. If someone tells something, or feels something, or contemplates something—all these actions can be expressed by the word *veda*. Since the sacred scriptures of the Hindus could be the means of spiritual knowledge; of becoming one with the supreme Reality; of attaining the knowledge of one’s true nature; of thinking, considering, or analysing the ultimate Truth; of feeling or contemplating divinity; and since they tell of these things, they are called Vedas, derived from the root *vid*.

Now let us come to the second part of the word ‘Vedanta’, that is, *anta*, which could mean the end, conclusion, or definite ascertainment. ‘Vedanta’, therefore means the end of the Vedas, the definite ascertainment, or the conclusion of the Vedas. The Vedas—Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, and Atharva Veda—are broadly divided into three sections: the Samhita containing prayer hymns, the Brahmanas containing description of rituals, and the Aranyakas containing texts on the knowledge of Brahman. So, the word ‘Vedanta’ points to the last section, *anta*, of the Vedas, that is, the Aranyakas, which contain the texts called the Upanishads. And, since these Upanishads are considered to be the summary, conclusion, or the last word of the Vedas, even by that logic, ‘Vedanta’ is the right word to be used for these texts. The summary of the Vedas, according to the Upanishads, is that the entire universe, with its living and non-living entities, is divine. This is the meaning of the word ‘Vedanta’.

PB

TRADITIONAL TALES

Anger Should Subside

ONCE BALADEVA, VASUDEVA, and Satyaki left town on some work. Many servants and soldiers accompanied them. All three of them had horses that could run very fast. And so, within some time, all three went ahead, away from the servants and soldiers and got stuck in the middle of the forest.

The sun was setting and it was getting dark. And in some time, all three got caught in a dense forest. They could not find a path to get out of the forest. They came to a place with dense trees. Having decided that it was not safe to go any further, they agreed to spend the remaining night there and tied their horses to the trees. The first quarter of the night passed thus. They had to spend the remaining three quarters in the forest before they could get out at dawn. They decided that each one of them would stand guard by turns, every quarter of the night, while the other two would sleep.

Satyaki had the first turn to stand guard. Vasudeva and Baladeva were sleeping. At that time, there appeared a terrible and frightening ghost. It roared at Satyaki: 'Hey! If you permit me to eat these two, I would do no harm to you.' Satyaki was not afraid even a little bit and roared louder that the ghost: 'O puny creature! If you wish to live, run from here this very moment! Beware! If you open your mouth, I will crush you!'

Hearing Satyaki's angry words, the ghost got angrier, and said with reddened eyes: 'Oh! So you would not listen to me? Come here, you idiot!' Saying thus, the ghost jumped at Satyaki. Unperturbed, Satyaki, also showed


more anger. Satyaki's anger was rising and so was the form and strength of the ghost and it pushed Satyaki to the ground several times and rolled him. Satyaki was wounded and his shoulder was ripped and blood flowed. His knees and face had swollen. A quarter of the night passed with Satyaki and the ghost fighting. And just as the quarter ended, the ghost disappeared. Satyaki woke up Baladeva, and himself went to sleep.

As soon as Satyaki fell asleep, the ghost came again and started quarrelling with Baladeva and talked to him just like it had with Satyaki. Baladeva too, became angry and started quarrelling with the ghost. Just as before, the form and strength of the ghost increased and it gave much trouble to Baladeva also. That quarter of night passed with the ghost and Baladeva wrestling. With the end of the quarter, the ghost disappeared as before, and Baladeva woke up Vasudeva, and himself went to sleep.

As soon as Baladeva fell asleep, the ghost returned and told Vasudeva: 'Run away from here leaving these two behind!' But, Vasudeva calmly replied: 'Come, come! It is good that you came. If I wrestle with you, the last quarter of the night would also pass. I would not feel sleepy and I would not feel exhausted.' This time too, the ghost pounced upon Vasudeva. However, this time only destruction awaited the ghost. As it was angrily fighting, Vasudeva laughingly said: 'Wow! What a great fighter you are! How much enthusiasm you have!' As Vasudeva said these words, the ghost's form started reducing in size and strength. Gradually, the ghost became the

size of a worm. Immediately, Vasudeva tied it in the corner of his blanket.

All three woke up early in the morning. Seeing Satyaki's swollen face and knees, Vasudeva asked in surprise: 'What happened to you?' Upon this, Satyaki and Baladeva recounted the previous night's happenings. Hearing this, Vasudeva laughingly opened the knot in his blanket, took the worm, and put it on the ground. Pointing that puny worm, he said: 'Look! This

is your ghost! Its form and strength will increase to the extent you show anger. Both of you could not recognise it. This is what is called anger; this is the nature of anger. If you do not become angry, its strength reduces and it becomes almost invisible. Therefore, if we control our anger, the anger of the opponent also disappears.' The other two felt sad thinking of their ignorance, even forgetting the pains caused by the previous night's fight. 



REVIEW ARTICLE

The Cauliflower: A Novel

Nicola Barker

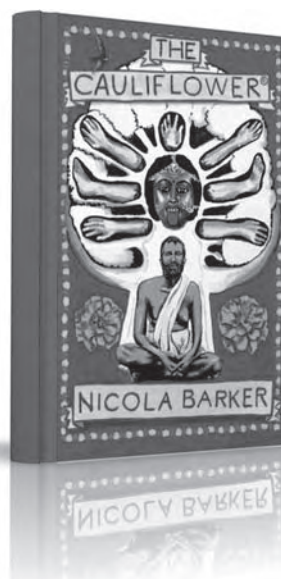
I

Preamble

I dreamt last night that
The Master's net caught another
foreign female 'fan': and her
'saucy' Cauli-Kali flower antics
surpass the Kripal-ian psychotics.
May the tribe swell.
The Master's Mother Kali affords
any number of skulls around her girdle!

I READ THE BOOK before I could read her interview. I was in a dilemma. She firmly declares: 'The novel, it needs to be said, is entirely focussed on appealing to a Western, secular mindset, so there were many potential pitfalls.'¹ And, she adds: 'In many ways what I have brought to the story is a measure of distance and a pinch of cynicism' (ibid.). Moreover, she adds: 'I am not a disciple of the guru's. I am not an expert in Hinduism. I have a Western sensibility. But I do understand stories. I am a novelist. And I can play with form' (ibid.). Another hint: 'And in my experience the best things in life emerge when you ignore conventions and boundaries, when you embrace the transgressive' (ibid.). Expressing a doubt, she says: 'Do I think this is something new? I don't know. All I know is that it felt right' (ibid.).

After such knowledge, what forgiveness or



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scope for a different view? Nicola is generous. 'Who am I to pick and choose?' (ibid.), you say but add something which is reassuring: 'I wanted the readers to have the option to find out for themselves' (ibid.). Very gracious. Allow me to review your 'portrait' of the great Master in my own way? No, I follow your way. Tell positive things which are edible but saleable in the market. For, 'Others abide our question. Thou art free.'²

II

The ambience is promising: 'Eat, pray, and love', roughly corresponding to the sheaths of food, vital energy, and bliss in Indian philosophy. The cover page is revelatory in its own bleak splendour: severed legs, stumps of hand, a palm, and the mandatory Kali with a lolling tongue.

Above all, the Great Master's picture on the cover seems to me sans his radiance; maybe my eyes are cataract-stricken. There are cauliflowers, all over. Can I add: Heinemann could have brightened it a little bit. Or, maybe they left it like that to be in tune with the contents.

I may forget. Why cauliflower? The simple answer I decided is because it is 'saucy'. For its presence and symbolism there is a narrative cited. For, Sri Ramakrishna, according to a story, received a cauliflower in a gathering in 1857. As soon as he saw it, he exclaimed: 'God is everywhere. God is in all of us. God is here—even here—in this humble cauliflower.'³ And what happens next? 'His eyes momentarily filled with tears. He pressed his cheek against the cauliflower's yellow crown. Then an intense anxiety suddenly gripped him and, glancing worriedly over his shoulder, he exclaimed, "We must hide it! Quickly! Quickly! Before my nephew, Harryday, comes"' (ibid.). We are told, in short, it is 'a contested vegetable'.

Hriday is the chosen intermediary in this narrative. Before we go further there is a passage that is both baffling and revelatory: 'Can we even truly call her [Nicola] "the author"? The collagist ... ? The vampire ... ? The colonizer ... ? The architect ... ? The plagiarizer ... ? The skid mark ... ?' (294). Are you not curious to ask why all these colourful epithets? The answer is miraculously, provided by the author herself: 'The *guru* has a very particular way of guiding people to spiritual fulfillment' (180). Nicola calls it 'the pick and mix' technique. 'He gets to know people (inspecting their faces, their hands, their tongues, their feet) asks them countless questions, then decides what spiritual approach most suits their needs' (ibid.).

What about language? Sri Ramakrishna's or the author's? We have a pleasingly suggestive answer: 'Ramakrishna is *promiscuous* by nature. There is no one route. No one-size-fits-all

approach' (180–1) [Emphasis added]. And his 'treatment' of Narendra results in his feeling 'distanced. Numb. Weird. Woolly' (181). And his 'poor mother has lost all hope for him. That *pesky guru*! That *pesky, pesky guru*!' (ibid.). [Emphasis added]. Though I was tempted to guess the meaning of 'pesky', I resisted. Being an admirer of T S Eliot's *Waste Land*, I tortured myself and tortured my wards for a long time teaching it, though I admire his caution: 'Words strain / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden / Under the tension, slip, slide, perish / Will not stay still.'⁴ Since 'words' matter for meaning, Nicola brings her own methodology. She piles up varied things one by one, one by one, as if, pardon my macabre humour, 'London bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down'! The author has some techniques, I could identify two: a long list of personages with their qualities preceded by the words Uncle or Aunt: For Sri Ramakrishna, always the Uncle.

Uncle: cannot remember; highly sensitive; saw an opportunity; had an amazing talent; very focussed mind; attention; is for you too; no regret running a play; withdraws into himself; contempt for education; never takes anything at face value; precious child.

May I now cite Sri Sarada Devi's qualities identified by the 'meticulous' author:

Mother Sarada: not a terribly good cook; painfully shy and modest; she has a nose ring; known earlier as the madman's wife; object of mystery worship; needs are few; difficult to put down; I want you although (?).

Apart from listing the qualities, which are many, the author also uses a haiku-like structure—this form is used quite frequently—a whole page and three lines: Uncle had long arms; reached almost as far; down as his knees

See another—Samadhi is: We call it a gift; but when you think about it; isn't it a curse?

Perhaps, in spite of my reluctance to say it, the author's 'experimental' language has shades of what the blurb says: 'irreverent'. The West has gone through Newton's dismissal of God, Darwin's bringing the primate as evolutionary principle and Freud's dismantling the mind as a seething cauldron of sex and add Marx's money as the centre. And above all, for our times, Sri Ramakrishna's woman and gold. Can we call it, and as I do often, sex and Sensex? Nicola's language, whether she is willing to accept it or not, is annoying but incredibly potential, unaware. Let us take the simple word 'saucy'. Cauliflower is 'saucy'. Oh my god! I told myself, how come, the Great Master anticipated that this idea, in his Bengali, gets translated as 'saucy'.

Recall Bankim Chandra Chatterjee; we recall that he was among the first to accept that the 'kicks of our white masters have bent my body'⁵ as a response to Sri Ramakrishna's humorous mention of the word 'Bankim' as 'bent'. Much more revelatory is another aspect. When the Master asks: 'Well, what do you say about man's duties?' Pat comes the answer: 'If you ask me about them, I should say they are eating, sleeping, and sex-life' (669). The Master's 'sharp' response is familiar, 'Eh? You are very *saucy*! What you do day and night comes out through your mouth. A man belches what he eats' (ibid.) [Emphasis added]. I always felt that no one else has identified this phenomenon so powerfully. But the Master, for so-called scholars is 'slow-witted' and 'a contested figure' in many ways; in 'a contested territory'.

In 'characterising' too, Nicola has her own confidence which seems never to have a second thought. At one point she describes Sri Sarada Devi: 'Sri Sarada Devi is a difficult individual to pin down—so quiet, so unconfident, so obliging, so self-effacing.' When a friend raises the question of liberation and looks at 'Sri Sarada Devi

square in the eye and passionately declares, "Liberation? What's the point in that? I don't *want* liberation; I want *you*!" Aw. Although ... [Sri Sarada Devi retorts, scandalized—quite ruining the lovely, sisterly atmosphere].'⁶ We don't know what is there in the friend's mind.

What do we make of such apparently cryptic portrayals? One need not isolate the individual words which seem cryptic. The very 'structure' of the incident is apparently presented in such a way that one feels there is more than what meets the eyes. I consoled myself from Carl Olson's *Indian Philosophers and Postmodern Thinkers*: 'Right speech means to abstain from all the wrongful kinds of speech—to not only speak the truth, but also to become aware of how often one deviates from the truth. The kind of language we use is indicative of our character. But correcting our language can also be a lever for changing our character.'⁷ I don't know about others. For Nicola's book I did try to transform into my 'psyche' the author's thoughts behind admittedly irreverent—even downright four-letter-word—diction. And I found a mind who really tried to understand Sri Ramakrishna: the negative is positive, the positive is negative.


But, this is not all. There is another form of attribution at many places in this 'unique' narrative. See what Hriday says: 'Man is a simple creature. And for the most part the formless *Brahman* is beyond his foolish comprehension.'⁸ And he even knows Kali's antics: 'Uncle was Kali's neglected suckling. He moaned and moaned but she would not comfort him. Her dark nipples were full of milk but she would not feed him so much as a single blessed drop. Uncle could not rest without her comfort. I was always full of doubt' (ibid.). And, 'Uncle too became doubtful' (ibid.). By the way, it is only in this that Hriday unlocks his scintillating intelligence.

But then, we come across language which is

the consequence of what is described as ‘combination of social unease, teenage *hauteur*, and exhaustion’. It leads to an excess to which it is difficult to apply the ‘transformation’ I suggested above. In the beginning ‘Narendra’ had some doubt about the Master’s mind. Should it warrant this kind of passage? Narendra ‘is also utterly convinced—more than he has ever been convinced of *anything in his whole short life*—that Sri Ramakrishna is a complete lunatic, a very crazy madman, a cunning and dangerous monomaniac’ (173–4). True, according to him, but this idiolect is *pesky*. Nicola herself, for instance, said about Sri Ramakrishna in her interview that: ‘At some level he has the ability to be completely different things to different people. That is both his genius and his great strength.’⁹ And the author’s genius is remarkable! Here I think there is bound to be the difficulty of her aim she stated in the interview. To a question on worship of Kali, Nicola’s response is: ‘One of my main duties, I felt, when writing the novel, was to act as a conduit for Hinduism to the West’ (ibid.). She says that she tries to remove terrible misconceptions about Hinduism. Good. Needed. But then, the irreverence should be within limits. It may slide into impudence. There are already considerable studies which are described as, in my opinion, physiologically ill-logical. This includes Freud, for whom the erotic is the interpretative tool.

This is from my point of view. You wrote it for the West. Agreed. It is necessary to keep in mind that we eat, pray, and love in global contexts. With varied perspectives. The book contains several other figures that I cannot list but there is one whom I want to mention: Kipling, to whom we can apply in Nicola’s metaphor: ‘a saucy tongue’. One saucier example is: Sri Ramakrishna’s mother ‘is naive and silly. Although I would never go so far as to call her an imbecile.’¹⁰ The claim that all ‘I know is it felt right’ is right

for you but for some readers it may not be right so that they miss a very important book by sheer apathy. Nicola’s attempt to write a novel narrative is welcome. I will generalise what I have in mind: whatever brilliance the human mind has pales into insignificance for one reason. If its immense spontaneous potential for sarcasm and caricature is subtle, but downright abuse and overflow its limitations of reception, it is of no use. Lines from T S Eliot come to my mind: ‘What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man / You cannot say, or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images, where the sun beats / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief / And the dry stone no sound of water.’¹¹

Since I toned down what I wanted to write, I can perhaps end now saying to the Great Master: ‘Forgive! They do *know* what they are *doing*.’ The Great Master has the last laugh. 

Prof. M Sivaramkrishna

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REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Ramakrishna Movement in South India:

Retrospect and Prospect

Dr Sagarika Biswas

Indic House, 2F Ballygunge Place (East), Kolkata 700019. www.indichouse.com. 2015. 196 pp. ₹ 175. PB. ISBN 9788192677453.

Many people believe and a few declare emphatically that it was South India which first recognised the unique potential of Swami Vivekananda, fostered it till this exceptional personality could make a mark globally, leading to the establishment of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission whose range and sweep in the twenty-first century is impressive as, says the author of this book, 'the movement represents dynamic not static piety' (189). Also, from personal experience I can vouch that the popularity of the Movement in South India, especially Hyderabad, is remarkable both qualitatively and quantitatively. In this scenario, a book which details the inception and spread of the Ramakrishna Movement in South India is both topical and vital, especially since the author links its 'gradual expansion and consolidation in South India ... [to] the renaissance of South India itself. ... [because] in the initial stage of this renaissance in South India, the Ramakrishna Movement has played a uniquely versatile and dynamic role' (187).

Dr Sagarika Biswas, the author of this volume, reiterates the significance of South India to the Ramakrishna Movement when she says: 'Without the love, admiration, affection, dedication and patronage of the people of South India, probably Ramakrishna Movement would not have bloomed to the extent and intensity that it has today' (33). She lists some of the people who were associated with the Movement—foremost among them being Swami Ramakrishnananda:

'Swamiji thought that Swami Ramakrishnananda was divinely ordained for the work in South India' (35)—Alasinga Perumal, Maharaja of Mysore, T S Avinashilingam, Swamis Nirmalananda, Tyagishananda, Yatiswarananda, among others.

The book meticulously maps the chronology of the Movement's beginning and expansion: Chennai 1897 with the arrival of Swami Ramakrishnananda, Bangalore 1904, Chennai Students' Home 1905, Travancore 1912, Haripad 1913, *Vedanta Kesari* started in 1914 from Chennai, Quilandy 1915, Nettayam hills near Thiruvananthapuram in 1916, Ootacamund 1924, Nattarampalli in 1926, Ponnampet 1927, Kancheepuram 1932, T Nagar, Chennai 1932, Kalady 1936, Coimbatore and Vishakhapatnam 1938, Thiruvananthapuram 1940, Chengalpattu and Salem 1941, Calicut 1943, Rajamundry and Mangalore 1947, Mysore 1952—to name just a few.

Divided into eight chapters preceded by a detailed introduction, with a Foreword by a renowned scholar of the Ramakrishna Movement, Prof. M Sivaramkrishna, the book is a commendable effort to establish the contemporary relevance of the Ramakrishna Movement by charting its progress of about 120 years; and the author observes: 'If we draw a graph of the growth of the Ramakrishna Movement, we will find it is always upward. The rate of increase may sometimes be slow but it is never decreasing. This movement stands as a meeting point of peace, love, unity, purity, harmony, renunciation, scientific thought, godliness, self-realization and selflessness' (180).

In a world that is facing crises of unprecedented dimensions, the Ramakrishna Movement can suggest a balanced alternative to the frenzied human endeavours, suggests the volume. It has the ability to reestablish sanity, says the author: 'Today, the Ramakrishna Movement with its indomitable vitality and diversity is able to illumine almost every aspect of human consciousness. The

movement helps people strive towards their moral and spiritual goals' (179). And in South India, possibly more than in other places, people are voluntarily and in large numbers choosing to come into the fold of the Movement.

This is a well-produced volume with a reader-friendly font and is well researched too. A good read for those who are interested in the Ramakrishna Movement, devotional studies, history, or philosophy.

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Hyderabad



The Conscious Mind

Zoltan Torey

The MIT Press, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142, USA. Website: www.mitpress.mit.edu. 191 pp. \$16.95. PB. ISBN 9780262527101.

Without consciousness there would, practically speaking, be no world, for the world exists as such only in so far as it is consciously reflected and consciously expressed by a psyche. *Consciousness is a precondition of being.* Thus observed Carl Jung. (Carl Gustav Jung, *The Undiscovered Self* (London: Routledge, 2005), 33). Mind, brain, and consciousness have evoked deep interest in scholars, scientists, philosophers, psychologists, and saints; many have tried to provide satisfactory answers to this mystery. Late Zoltan Torey, clinical psychologist and independent scholar, provides us in this concise pocket-sized book—which aptly is a part of MIT Press's 'Essential Knowledge Series'—a model which tries to explain this mystery.

In the introduction, the author rightly observes that we as a human species have always tried to find a unified, 'whole-view' of all branches of knowledge. He proposes his model of mind and consciousness based on a unified view of neuroscience, linguistics, and evolutionary biology. The evolutionary process is explained in two steps: evolution of the single-cell 'automated-response' organism into the 'multi-cellular-nerve-network' called brain, evident in animal brains

displaying 'awareness' of environment, and evolution of 'awareness' into 'consciousness', a 'self-reflective variant' of awareness. Consciousness is the 'awareness' augmented with an 'offline response mechanism' consisting of images, thoughts, and language. It was the qualitative enrichment of the brainstem's decision making functionality that led to awareness becoming 'conscious' of itself and developing an ability to select appropriate response to any particular input.

In the further chapters, evolution of language is traced to the 'speech-areas of brain' acquiring a motor-arm; this also helped in the emergence of a 'conscious self'. Basic proto-language of the Homo sapiens evolved into nouns and verbs, which in time grew to adjectives, adverbs, and functional words, along with syntax. Communication, speech, and thought followed and thus mental representation of the world improved. The 'self' became an integral part of cognition with 'language controlled aspect of the brain' becoming 'mind'. Next, the discussion on 'free-will' is a bit technical but the gist is: 'mind's generation of mental options, in combination with the brainstem's decision-making role, gave us the selection mechanism, the key to our functional autonomy, the only kind of freedom that can be had in a deterministic world' (119). In the end, the author concludes with a question for further research: what is 'conscious mind's rightful place in cosmic scenario'?

The reader-friendly features of the book are: some interspersed pages with black background highlighting the important definitions in the relevant section, 'Notes', and 'Glossary' provided at the end of the book. If representational diagrams, especially of the various parts of brain, were provided in the relevant chapters, it would have made it easier for the general reader to grasp the complex points under discussion. Overall, the author has presented his model in an informative and readable manner which gives us a concise and fascinating picture of the evolutionary processes that led to the emergence of 'conscious mind'. General readers can use the book as a good starting point for further exploration of this complex subject.

Mangesh Buwa

Nashik

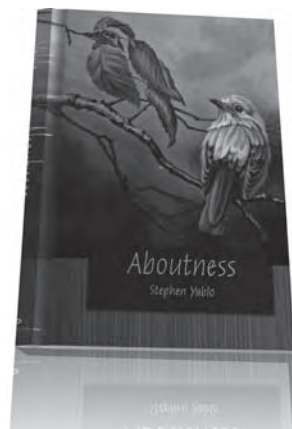
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Aboutness

Stephen Yablo

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540. USA. 2014. xi + 221 pp. \$27.95. PB. ISBN 9780691173658.



ABOUTNESS' IS A GRAND-SOUNDING name for something basically familiar. Books are on topics; portraits are of people; the *1812 Overture* concerns the Battle of Borodino. Aboutness is the relation that meaningful items bear to whatever it is that they are *on* or *of* or that they *address* or *concern*.

Aboutness has been studied before. Brentano made it the defining feature of the mental. Phenomenologists attempt to pin down the aboutness-features of particular mental states. Materialists sometimes claim to have grounded aboutness in natural regularities. Medieval grammarians distinguished what we are talking about from what is said about it, and linguists have returned to this theme. Historians ask what the Civil War was about. *Report from Iron Mountain: On the Possibility and Desirability of Peace* asks this about war in general. Attempts have even been made, by library scientists and information theorists, to operationalize aboutness.

And yet the notion plays no serious role in philosophical semantics. This is surprising—sentences have aboutness properties, if anything does—so let me explain. One leading theory, the truth-conditional theory, gives the meaning of a sentence, *Quisling betrayed Norway*, say, by listing the scenarios in which it is true, or false. Nothing is said about the principle of selection, about *why* the sentence would be true, or false,

in those scenarios. Subject matter is the missing link here. A sentence is true because of how matters stand where its subject matter is concerned.

According to the other leading theory, *Quisling betrayed Norway* expresses an amalgam of Quisling, betrayal, and Norway. One imagines that sentences are about whatever makes its way into the corresponding amalgam. This lets too much in, however. *Quisling did NOT betray Norway* is about Quisling and Norway, and perhaps betrayal. It is not about NOT, the logical operation of negation. Yet NOT is just as much an element of the amalgam as Quisling.

This book makes subject matter an independent factor in meaning, constrained but not determined by truth-conditions. A sentence's meaning is to do with its truth-value in various possible scenarios, *and* the factors responsible for that truth-value. No new machinery is required to accommodate this. The proposition that *S* is made up of the scenarios where *S* is true; *S*'s reasons for, or ways of, being true are just additional propositions. When Frost writes, *The world will end in fire or in ice*, the truth-conditional meaning of his statement is an undifferentiated set of scenarios. Its 'enhanced' meaning is the same set, subdivided into fiery-end worlds and icy-end worlds.

Now you know the plan: to make subject matter an equal partner in meaning. I have not said why this would be desirable.

The initial motivation comes from our sense of when sentences say the same thing. The truth-conditional theory does not respect the intuitive appearances here. Mathematicians know a *lot* of truths; metaphysicians know a lot of others. These truths are all identical if we go by truth-conditions, since they are true in the same cases: all of them. *Here is a sofa* does not seem to say the same as *Here is the front of a sofa*, and *behind it is the back*, but they are (or can be understood to be) truth-conditionally equivalent. *All crows are black* cannot say quite the same as *All non-black things are non-crows*, for the two are confirmed by different evidence. Subject matter looks to be the distinguishing feature. One is about crows, the other not.

Aboutness is interesting in its own right; that is the first reason for caring about it. The second is that it helps us to make sense of *other notions* interesting in their own right.


So, for instance, one hypothesis can seem to *include* another, or to have the other as a *part*. Part of what is required for all crows to be black is that this crow here should be black. It is not required that all crows be black or on fire, though this is also implied by the blackness of crows. The idea is elusive, but we rely on it all the time. What does it mean to *unpack* an assertion? Unpacking is teasing out the asserted proposition's various parts. What does it mean for your position to in certain respects *agree* with mine? We agree to the extent that our views have content in common; part of what you say is identical to part of what I say. What does it mean for a claim that is overall mistaken to get *something* right? You got something right if your claim was partly true, in the sense of having wholly true parts. How right you were depends on the size of those parts.

Content-inclusion is elusive, I said, but this might be questioned. *A* includes *B*, one might think, just if *A* implies *B*. The argument *A* ∴ *B* is in that case valid. Every third logic book explains

a valid argument as one whose conclusion was already there in the premise(s). For *B* to be already there in *A* is for *B* to be *included* in *A*, surely.

Suppose this were right; inclusion was implication. There would then be truth in every hypothesis whatsoever, however ridiculous, for there is no *A* so thoroughly false as not to imply a true *B*. (*Snow is hot and black* gets something right by this standard, namely, that snow has these properties, or else boiled tar does.) *A* contains *B*, I propose, if the argument *A*, therefore *B*, is both truth-preserving and subject-matter-preserving. *Snow is hot and black* ∴ *Snow is hot and black*, or *boiled tar is hot and black*, though not truth-conditionally ampliative, does break new ground on the aboutness front.

Why assert false sentences with truth in them, rather than just true bits? I am moved by a remark of William James's: 'a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule.' If truth-puritanism is the rule *Insist on pure truths; accept no substitutes*, then it threatens to be irrational, for there might be truths accessible only as parts of larger falsehoods. Dallying with the larger falsehoods would be good policy in such cases. The proper rule allows us to stretch the truths, if we make clear that our interest and advocacy extend only to the part about thus and such.

A lot of philosophical problems take the form: Such and such has GOT to be true. But how CAN it be? *Pegasus does not exist*, we say, and this is surely correct. How can it be, though, when there is no Pegasus for it to be true of? Again, a color shift too small to notice cannot possibly make the difference between red and not red. But it sometimes must, or a slippery slope argument forces us to extend redness even to green things. The number of Martian moons is indisputably two. How is that possible, when it is disputed whether numbers even exist? 

REPORTS

News of Branch Centres

Twenty-six students of **Ekalavya Model Residential School, Jhargram**, based on their performance in Jagadis Bose National Science Talent Search (JBNSTS) examination, were selected for a workshop held at JBNSTS, Kolkata, from 30 August to 3 September 2016. The process of taking over the school and starting a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission on the school campus is underway.

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Purulia has been awarded Ramawatar Gupta Pratibha Puraskar 2016 by Sanmarg Foundation, Kolkata, for achieving the best results in Hindi in class-10 examination conducted by West Bengal Board of Secondary Education. Sri Keshari Nath Tripathi, Governor of West Bengal, handed over the award consisting of a certificate and trophy in a function held at Kolkata on 25 June.

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka, Bangladesh conducted a devotees' convention on 19 July which was attended by about 800 people.

Celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita

Baranagar Math held a students' convention on 26 June in which about 130 students participated.

Kankurgachhi Math conducted a devotees' convention on 24 July attended by 800 devotees.

Swamiji's Ancestral House held two lectures on 27 June and 9 July which were attended altogether by 500 people.

Kadapa centre conducted teachers' workshop from 9 to 11 September in which about 70 teachers participated and were given certificates. Sri B V Ramanakumar DIG of police, Kurnool Range, Kurnool, was the chief guest, and faculty member,



Teachers' Workshop at Ramakrishna Mission, Kadapa

along with Dr M C Das, Swami Guneshananda of Visakhapatnam, and Dr PPVD Nagatrishulapani were present. The centre also conducted monthly spiritual retreat, attended by about 100 devotees.

Swachchha Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign)

Kankurgachhi centre launched Swachchha Kankurgachhi for a Swachchha Bharat, a cleanliness drive, on 26 June. About 40 persons cleaned Maniktala main road and several lanes of Kankurgachhi area that day.

Nagpur centre took out a rally in Takiya area on 5 June, World Environment Day, to create awareness about cleanliness. About 75 people, mostly children, took part in the rally. As a part of the rally, the children enacted a street play.

Baranagar Mission Ashrama conducted a cleaning programme on 30 June in which 550 students and others cleaned the roads and lanes of Baranagar locality and the Ashrama premises.

Different institutions under **Coimbatore Mission** centre held a number of cleanliness-related programmes in June. The students took a pledge for a clean India and attended special lectures on cleanliness. They also cleaned several government offices, temple premises, roads, and a hospital.

Naora centre held six cleanliness drives in Jibantala block of South 24 Paraganas district between 26 and 30 June. In all, about 700 people, mainly students, cleaned several playgrounds, school premises, religious places, and roads.

At the request of Howrah Municipal Corporation, **Shilpamandira**, polytechnic under Saradapitha, is maintaining, since June, a lawn laid beside the footpath on GT Road near Belur Math.

Values Education and Youth-related Programmes conducted by centres in India

Chennai Math conducted a three-day youth camp from 17 to 19 June in which 230 youths took part. On the last day, the youths cleaned the area around Chennai Math and the nearby Sri Kapaleeshwarar Temple.

Hyderabad centre held a three-day personality development camp from 24 to 26 June in which about 200 girls participated.

Kankurgachhi Math conducted five values education workshops covering six educational institutes in Birbhum district from 10 to 12 June, attended altogether by 400 people, mostly students.

Vadodara centre held two seminars on values education for teachers on 16 and 18 June at Ahmedabad and Vadodara respectively. In all, 260 teachers participated in the seminars.

Relief

Distress Relief: The following centres distributed various items, mentioned against their names, to needy people: **Bagda:** 1,693 shirts, 1,701 pants, and 184 sweaters from 22 April to 20 July. **Baranagar Mission, Kolkata:** 725 shirts, 240 T-shirts, and 640 pants from 22 April to 5 July. **Chandipur:** 30 dhotis, 401 shirts, 477 T-shirts, and 109 pants from 18 April to 26 June. **Cherapunjee:** 10,404 shirts, 2,805 T-shirts, 11,817 pants, 4,121 tops, 249 tunics, 116 leggings, 962 saris, 4,406 sweaters, and 4,941 jackets from 12 April to 4 July. **Cooch Behar:** 50 saris, 100 dhotis, 80 assorted garments, and 45 plates on 20 July. **Gourhati:** 300 shirts, 210 T-shirts, and 300 pants from 6 March to 10 July. **Guwahati:** 59 tops, 60 sweaters, 28 jackets, and 28 mufflers in June. **Itanagar:** 806 pants and 2,193 tops from 1 to 20 June. **Jammu:** 1,370 shirts, 1,314 T-shirts, 1,687 pants, and 1,500 jackets from 23 April to 26 July. **Kankhal:** 509 shirts and 246 pants from 5

to 8 April. **Kothar:** 2,741 shirts, 2,752 T-shirts, and 2,743 pants from 25 February to 15 May. **Luc-know:** 1,504 shirts, 3,527 pants, 1,657 sweatshirts, 1,032 jackets, and 1,488 sweaters from 15 March to 3 April. **Madurai:** 2,550 notebooks on 1 July, and 2,997 shirts and 1,494 pants from 28 March to 13 July. **Malda:** 748 shirts and 767 pants from 1 May to 14 June. **Manasadwip:** 4,116 shirts and 3,916 pants from 3 to 29 July. **Medinipur:** 994 shirts and 522 pants from 2 to 30 June. **Nagpur:** 4,069 shirts and 1,978 pants from 2 April to 8 June. **Naora:** 50 saris, 50 lungis, 21 children garments, 40 adults garments, and 40 baby blankets on 5 and 9 July. **Narendrapur, Kolkata:** 1,125 shirts and 558 pants on 17 and 18 June. **Narottam Nagar:** 61 shirts, 205 T-shirts, 180 pants, 1,642 tops, 122 sweaters, 445 jackets, 244 sweatshirts, 160 schoolbags, 160 pairs of shoes, 133 bottles of hair oil, and 1,600 sachets of shampoo from 8 to 27 July. **Purulia:** 1,433 shirts and 1,447 pants from 20 April to 25 July. **Ramharipur:** 206 shirts and 534 T-shirts from 27 April to 30 May. **Ranchi Sanatorium:** 870 shirts, 525 pants, and 1,030 sweatshirts from 25 February to 14 March. **Saradapitha, Belur:** 2,528 shirts, 1,095 T-shirts, and 2,543 pants from 28 May to 18 July. **Shillong:** 217 shirts, 210 T-shirts, 349 pants, 597 tops, 246 ladies dresses, 144 sweaters, and 207 jackets from 15 March to 7 July.

Drought Rehabilitation: **Hyderabad** centre installed two reverse osmosis plants at Devala Thirumalapur and Machinenipally villages in Mehaboobnagar district which will help the villagers avail filtered ground water. The plants were inaugurated on 27 June.

Distress Rehabilitation: Two houses constructed by **Purulia** centre were handed over to 2 poor and needy families in Malthore and Leda-bera villages of Purulia district on 17 and 23 June.

Economic Rehabilitation: **Chandipur** centre distributed 11 sewing machines to poor and needy people on 28 July.



The best guide in life is strength.
In religion, as in all other matters,
discard everything that weakens
you, have nothing to do with it.
—Swami Vivekananda

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